

MANHUNT

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MANHUNT

VOLUME 3, NUMBER 11, November, 1955. Single copies 35 cents. Subscriptions, \$4.00 for one year in the United States and Possessions; elsewhere \$5.00 (in U. S. funds) for one year. Published monthly by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc. (an affiliate of the St. John Publishing Co.), 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. Telephone MU 7-5623. Entered as Second Class matter at the Post Office, New York, N. Y. Additional entry at Concord, N. H. The entire contents of this issue are copyrighted 1955 by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc., under the International Copyright Convention. All rights reserved under Inter-American Copyright Convention. Title registered U. S. Pat. Office. Reproduction or use, without express permission, of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Postage must accompany manuscripts and drawings if return is desired, but no responsibility will be assumed for unsolicited materials. Manuscripts and art work should be sent to Manhunt, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. No similarity between any of the names characters, persons and/or institutions appearing in this magazine and those of any living or dead person or institution is intended and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in the U. S. A.

Big Frank

HE PULLED over onto the gravelled shoulder and the dumb-looking pimpled kid started to open the door to get out.

"Thanks for the lift, mister," the kid said and Frank nodded, then wheezed with the effort of leaning over and taking the little paper sack of specialties out of the glove compartment and handing one to the kid.

"Compliments of Big Frank," he

Everybody hated Big Frank — but Big Frank couldn't remember what he'd done to make them feel that way.

BY BRYCE WALTON

said as the kid looked at the little clay pipe with the green shamrocks on it.

"Thanks," the kid said and then he got out and walked away through the heat waves down a path through the gray dusty waste between the sagebrush.

Frank sat there sweating and wondering if he hadn't ought to stop and take a little snooze, and then decided against it because it was just a little way now to the next stop, *Pete's Stop-N-Chow*.

He wiped at the fat hanging over his collar with a big blue wet handkerchief. He could feel the sweat running down off his bald head, overflowing his cheeks, draining to soak his collar and run down into the fat folds beneath his arm pits. His thick legs were spread out and his belly hung down on the leatherette between his thighs.

He maneuvered the Buick back onto the highway with careful quarter-turns of the wheel, thinking about this business of getting sleepier and sleepier all the time. He got sleepy more often and he snoozed for longer periods. But the thing was that he got the sleepest only at certain spots along the highway . . . like approaching *Pete's Stop-N-Chow* for example. He had been getting steadily sleepier all the time, the closer he got to Pete's, and that was because of the girl he'd picked up there where the Highways crossed on the other side of Pete's place.

Lucille — was that her name?

There had been so many of them it was hard remembering their names. Or where he had picked them up. Or what they had done after that — that was the hardest to remember. It was like those things had happened in a dream, and he drove by those places sometimes with only a vague feeling of having been there before.

Only he didn't want to think about that. He never did want to think about it, and he figured maybe that was why he was getting sleepier all the time going past those places.

But still, he wouldn't have picked the kid up just now except that the kid had looked just like a woman standing up there ahead with his thumb out. The heat waves played tricks on a man after a while.

Once there had been women hitch-hiking all the time and you could take your pick. They had been like flies crawling along on the highways from one end of his run to the other, stickily moving like flies crawling on flypaper.

But there weren't many any more.

The highway was getting lonelier and lonelier all the time.

Pete's Stop-N-Chow was a little dusty, one-pump stop where the highways crossed. It had a bar and a lunchroom combined and got a little business from truck stops and a spill-over from some government project hidden away out there somewhere in the sand.

It had always been a pleasant place to stop. Everybody laughed at

Frank's gags, and there were a few beers.

Only this time nobody laughed. There was something wrong, and Frank was beginning to feel uneasy. He was beginning to get nervous. He didn't know what was wrong, but when they just looked at him without cracking even a smile, then there was sure as hell something wrong.

He started to connect it up some way with that girl — Lucille was it? — he'd picked up on that other trip through, but there couldn't be any connection, he figured.

Maybe he just wasn't funny any more. Well, that was bad if that was true. Plenty bad. Tobacco was Frank's main line, but the specialties were important too. You had to be special yourself, too, along with the specialties in the leather bags. You had to be always ready with the jokes to help unload the stuff. And if nobody laughed, nobody bought much of anything either.

Nobody was laughing now. Not even a damn grin. The fly kept buzzing over there in the dusty window, and the smell of stale beer was getting worse. The three guys who had been sitting at the window playing blackjack had stopped playing. They just sat there looking at him.

Pete Huey stood to the right of the cash register over the glass case and leaned on it and watched Big Frank like he was trying to figure something out, but Pete didn't want

any specialties. He took on about the same main line of stock as he always did. A case of mixed cartons of cigarettes, some cigars and pipe tobacco, and a case of Bull Durham. But no specialties.

Pete was a lean brown little man with bright black eyes and an explosive way of just being quiet and looking. He was the kind of lean little man who always could scare Big Frank.

A guy like that always made Frank even more conscious than usual of how big and awkward he was, but you could usually take care of that with gags and beer and everybody laughing it up.

Nobody laughed.

"I don't want no more of that junk," Pete said softly. "I ain't sold hardly none of it. It just collects flies and dust."

Frank had the specialties spread all over there. The junk hanging stapled to red, green and purple cards, pasted in cellophane bags stuck to yellow cards with black printing. Key-rings with eight balls in them. Paper billfolds stamped to look like alligator skin with four-leaf clovers on them. Dull tin cigarette cases with glossy-colored naked women posed on them with glue. Clay pipes with green shamrocks.

"It's got to be junk so there'll be a quick turnover."

Nervously, Frank opened up more specialties. Playing cards, nail clippers, bottle stoppers, pencil flashlights, ball pens and hooks. . . .

"And here, boys, is the topper," he said. He felt desperate. His jowls were a bright hot red color and he prayed for a laugh. He held the ashtray up, a blue glass ashtray with a little boy standing on the rim. "Big Frank's specialty of the week, boys. Put the lighted cigarette here, see. Press the little button . . . ha . . . ha . . . see, the little boy performs and the water puts out the cigarette . . . a . . . ha . . ."

Only none of them so much as cracked a smile.

The room seemed stuffy and he had to get out of there. Quickly he started raking the specialties back into the leather bags. A drop of sweat fell on the paper alligator skin with the four-leaf clovers on it.

Then he had it figured. They were working a gag. Pretending not to think he was funny. Let it build and ride, and then just as he walked out, they would all bust out laughing . . .

Only he was half-way out the door and nobody had laughed.

"Well, so long," he called back through the door. "Listen, Pete. You'd better cut the door wider. I'd go out sideways only I ain't got a side!"

The silence was like someone had hit him in the belly. He hunched his sloping shoulders and started down the steps.

"Hey, Fatty," he heard Ben Huey say. The word Fatty cut into him like a rasping file. "You ever pick up hitch-hikers?"

Something in his stomach seemed to turn completely over. He turned with heavy slowness in the glaring heat. Pete Huey was standing in the doorway shading his eyes from the sun. The three guys were looking out at him through the dusty glass, looking under that Schlitz beer sign.

"Sure, sometimes," Frank said carefully. "If they're little enough to get inside a car with me." He swallowed, then said, "Why?"

"Well, there's a woman out by the crossing wants a lift, Fatty. She came in here on that Gray Lines truck, but the truck was turning off on 53 and she's going on down 66. She ain't got a ride yet. Maybe you'd help her out, Fatty."

He doesn't know it, but he's liable to get killed calling me that. He's liable to get hurt . . .

That ain't funny, McGee, that ain't funny at all . . .

But what could you say to a tough lean little guy like Pete Huey? What about those three tanned westerners looking out the window? You just had to keep moving and figure on them being in a good humor the next time.

He nodded, but he didn't say anything and he got into the Buick with a painful ritual and settled himself into the wet mold of the seat and carefully drove off toward the crossing.

In the rear-view mirror he could see Pete Huey watching him go, and Pete's new red Ford shining in the sun beside the *Stop-N-Chow*.

He wouldn't stop at Pete's anymore. The hell with them. All of them. They had no right to call him that. He wouldn't stop there anymore, and he wouldn't stop at the crossing either and pick up the woman hitch hiker.

He started to feel sleepy, that feeling of lead weights on his eyelids. He started to forget Pete Huey and the names they had called him. He had to watch himself, keep his sense of humor, and forget it. He couldn't afford to get mad any more. He just couldn't afford to do that . . .

She stood there with that haughty look, like she didn't give a damn. And he had pulled up there close to her before he hardly knew he was stopping. He slid his hand over his belly and coughed as he reached over and pushed open the door.

She was slim and she was wearing a thin brown skirt and a thin blouse. She had small firm breasts and legs that were all right, not bad, not bad for a hitch-hiker. Movie stars didn't hitch hike across deserts.

He asked her how far she was going and she said Las Vegas and how far was he going and he said Los Angeles, and was that far enough?

And then he blushed a little as she sneered, and he realized that "far enough" could have a double meaning. But anyway she stuck her head through the door like a turtle, then pushed the dusty handbag in and

then slid into the seat and he saw the flash of her bare legs.

He felt a belch forming and swallowed it as he tossed the dusty handbag into the back seat and, as he did that, feeling his hand accidentally brush against her shoulder.

She gave him the dirty look and wriggled over tight up against the other side of the car. They always seemed to expect the worst, or had to act like they did. But she seemed to be going a little too far with it when she had only just got into the car. All he wanted was a little companionship so he would not be lonesome and the highway would seem shorter. All he wanted was a little decent conversation so he wouldn't doze off and wreck himself for good.

That was all he had ever wanted.

A new V-8 Studebaker went by about a hundred miles an hour just as he started off the shoulder back onto the highway. He felt the needle slide up to fifty and stop as though magnetized. He never went over fifty and the Buick knew it.

"Hope you like to talk," he said after a while. "Helps keep me awake. Or even if you just like to listen —"

"I just want a ride into Vegas."

Okay, sister. Okay. Maybe she wasn't a friendly type at all. Sometimes you couldn't tell at first and sometimes you never could tell. Maybe she was just pretending, and maybe she wasn't.

It was always the same. Usually he could tell, but sometimes he couldn't tell whether they were

friendly or not. And he had to be sure about that, he had to be awfully awfully sure about that.

Like with Lucille, and that other one just before Lucille, just outside Gallup, what was her name, Irene was it, something like that? Seemingly friendly enough at first, then —

But he couldn't afford to think about that. It made him feel sleepy. He might wreck the car and wake up dead.

He kept averting his eyes, forcing himself not to look at her knee, the way the thin nylon skirt outlined her long legs.

He tried to make more conversation and told her he was a salesman. She asked him if he was going to try out some dirty jokes. He gripped the wheel hard. His hands were moist. She stayed over there tight up against the door looking out. She had a thin face with big red lips and blond short hair in ringlets. Not bad. For a hitch hiker she wasn't so bad at all.

Half an hour later he tried again. When he asked her very politely what she was going to do in Vegas, she got snotty and asked him what he *thought* she was going to do in Vegas. As if he'd been hinting around about something there.

She was sure grateful, this one was, for getting a lift. Maybe she liked standing out there wooing heat stroke under the desert sun. His mouth was tight and he took one hand off the wheel and clenched it like a big white puff-ball.

Why did so many of them insist on getting the wrong slant? And anyway why did a goddamned hitch-hiker have to be so particular? Who was anybody bumming on the highway, woman or no woman? Just a goddamned bum, that was all. Just a drifter, and nobody ever gave a damn about drifters, he knew that for sure, they could just disappear and nobody ever cared —

Just calm down, just take it easy now, easy does it . . . so she's just the unfriendly type, now you know it, so let it ride, forget it. Now you know, and that's a good thing. Now you know and won't have any trouble.

He didn't want to try for laughs either. With hitch-hikers he felt different. He felt more himself. He wanted to be himself, not the funny boy. Just himself, close and friendly . . .

But he kept getting sleepier and finally he had to pull up off the road into the shade by that old abandoned lean-to some Indian had probably used once to sell blankets.

She had the door part way open before he'd hardly stopped. She was sneering at him, and her eyes looked scared. "What's the big idea now, what do you think you're up to?"

He couldn't let himself even look at her as he leaned his head back and closed his eyes.

"What's the idea?"

"I get sleepy," he said. "I have to take a little cat-nap every once in a while. If you don't like it, get out."

"Just a little cat-nap, sure, I'll bet."

"That's why I wanted to talk, but you don't like to talk, so now I've got to take a cat-nap."

Maybe she didn't believe him, but he didn't give a damn. He dozed off. He could smell the cheap wild-rose smell of her perfume.

When he opened his eyes he felt her head on his shoulder. Her warm sweating body pressed tight against him and she was all curled up in the seat like a puppy dog. Well I'm damned, he thought, I sure am. And her hand was lying palm up on his thigh.

His right arm was squeezed down between them, but he didn't dare move it even though it was getting numb. He just sat there, not daring to move even his eyes hardly. She might wake up and this was so nice, it felt so good, it felt so warm and close and he realized how lonely he was getting all the time and how much he was missing all these years.

She had fallen asleep and fallen over that way against him, with her legs curled up under her. She was really probably a very friendly type, and when she dropped off to sleep then her real self came out and she was very friendly like this. He smiled tenderly.

Then all at once she was awake and giving a startled frightened gasp and scooting away from him and jamming herself up against the door over there, and glaring at him like she'd been raped or something.

"You got a hell of a nerve!" she whispered.

He didn't even try to explain because it never made any difference.

"You sure got one hell of a nerve."

As he drove on he thought about the fact that no matter whether they were friendly types or not, it would still be different if he had been someone else. Almost anyone else but who he was. One thing for sure, if they weren't completely one hundred per cent the friendly type, he sure wasn't the kind to change their minds. Anything he did always just made it worse, and he had to be careful and not try to do anything to change her. Not to try and then not to get mad —

When he stopped at Desert Springs, she told him there were worse things than walking all the way, the rest of the way clear into Las Vegas, and she walked away down the sidewalk carrying her dusty little handbag. He transacted business in the two places, the drug store and the bar, and then when he went out to get back into his car, there she was. There she was waiting for him.

Waiting there and smiling a little bit and looking coy and sorry about acting the way she had acted. She even said she was sorry from under her little straw hat with the ribbon around it. "But you know, a girl can't be too careful, you know that."

But her figure was blurred and when he had to lean against the car because his knees felt so weak, he didn't even notice how hot the car metal was against his white skin.

Because that was what the other one had said wasn't it? Lucille, that had been her name, something like that. The one who had tried to scream there where the water ran over the rocks . . . where was that now . . . the Rest-Inn, wasn't it? Near the Rest-Inn cabins.

Or was it Dolores, or had it been Louella, or Margaret, or Melinda, or Helen, or Irene . . .

No, it was Lucille, wasn't it? Lucille something or other, sometime or other, who had said that, "but a girl can't be too careful . . ."

The hell with her, with all the others, the hell with every last one of them. You couldn't ever tell what they were really like. He had to move on, and he didn't want any more trouble, not any more. He was getting too tired of the road now anyway, and he couldn't take it any more —

He was getting into the car, but she had that door open and was looking in at him, just like a turtle looking out of a shell. His foot slipped off the starter.

"Ah, come on," she said plaintively, "didn't I say I was sorry?"

Sure, you said it. He stared at her and mopped at his jowls with the big blue wet handkerchief.

She was smiling nice. Maybe she really was a friendly type after all.

Maybe there was one once in a while.

So he told her to get in. His hand was shaking as he lit up a new cigar.

She wasn't bad at all for a hitch-hiker, he was thinking as he drove along the long long highway. That was his speed anyway, a hitch-hiker, a tramp who wasn't really going anywhere. He yawned. His eyelids had lead weights hanging and pulling at them.

Later she even got around to telling him her name, and she was a lot more friendly and she seemed relaxed more then, and she asked him what his name was. Her name was Lois Martin, and what was his.

"Frank Connel," he said timidly. "People call me Big Frank."

"I figured maybe they called you Pee-Wee. Or maybe Tiny."

He didn't say anything.

"You ought to bring your wife along so you wouldn't get sleepy."

"Well, I'm not married or I'd sure do that."

"You ever been married?"

No, he'd never been married. No wife, no home, nothing like that. What the hell was it, to have anything like that? Just hotel and motel rooms by the thousands 'til you couldn't remember where you'd stayed over the last time, or what the names of them were. Married?

"No, I've never been married."

They laughed, even those houses with the red lanterns in the door, they laughed at old five-by-five rolling in.

Then he really started getting

sleepy. He was getting so sleepy he just couldn't keep his eyes open and several times his head fell to his chest and jerked up again and the monotonous lulling song of the endless road seemed to move in his blood and he got the feeling the car was just sort of moving on up into the air and sailing away and he didn't need to worry about —

He spun the wheel back and the car made the curve.

"I'm getting woozy."

And then he knew why. He knew why and all at once he wasn't woozy any more, and he was scared and he wanted to go by without seeing the sign but it was there and it kept getting bigger and bigger as he approached the curve where the sign was set so that until you turned the curve you thought you were going to run right into that sign:

Rest-Inn, 1/2 Mile

Cold Drinks. Cool shade.

This girl, this hitch-hiker, Lois, she was saying over and over that they ought to stop here, it was such a cool spot, and she was so hot and tired.

He didn't even want to look, let alone stop, at the broken rocks rising above the rushing stream where the pine trees, those small stunted ones, grew all along the rushing stream, and the shade he remembered wildly was soft in the pine needles between the rocks . . .

"No, no, not here," he said quickly, not looking any more. "We go on to Pierceton. That's a regular

stop. I've got accommodations — "

"Ah, come on, Big Frank. Let's just stop and stretch for a second!"

She was smiling and he could see the way she was leaning toward him, and her hand touching his arm, real friendly like now.

He could feel the nervous twitching in his belly. The awareness, like it just sneaked up on you like someone with a knife in the dark, sneaking up behind and slashing. He wet his lips nervously and he tried, he really tried, to keep on going, but there was the turn-off through the pines, over the pine needles, branches scraping the car top, the smell of pine in the nose, past the picnic tables and outdoor fireplaces all blackened, past the two green outhouses, along the road all padded and silent with pine needles.

When the motor was dead he could hear the water rushing over rocks, and a bird up in a tree. There wasn't another sound in the cool shade where the sun was gone because the cliffs rising up on the other side of the water had shut the sun off all at once.

"Come on, Big Frank. Let's take a little walk upstream and call it a vacation."

Her tight skirt moved revealingly as she walked away and started up the path along the side of the stream. He watched her lift one leg, then the other, and take off her black high-heeled pumps and then keep

on walking through the splotches of shade.

"Come on, Big Frank," he heard her calling. "Don't you want to take a little walk with me?"

He started walking after her and he threw away the dead cigar butt. He felt the fat galling inside his thighs as he started puffing along after her.

There was no one else around. About a quarter of a mile farther on was the *Rest-Inn* cabins, but there didn't seem to be anyone else around here now. He found her quite a ways upstream, and somewhere he thought he heard a car coming off the highway and the motor dying, but it seemed a long way off. Even his own hard wheezing breath seemed far away.

He kneaded the damp flesh around his collar and loosened his knit tie, and walked closer to where she lay next to the stream. She looked up at him and smiled invitingly. Her shoes were off and her long slim legs were in the water and her dress was pulled up above her knees.

"Come on, sit down and let's relax, Big Frank," she whispered.

He stood over her, feeling his weight dragging at him, the weakness coming up and dropping down and centering in his knees. Maybe she really meant it. Maybe she was really friendly after all.

"There isn't anybody around, Big Frank. Come on — let's you and me relax —"

It was hard to sit down. He had to

squat heavily on one knee; then put one hand on the ground and then get his legs straightened out, but she didn't seem to mind, just kept on smiling and looking friendlier all the time.

His heart thumped harder and harder, and then he was sitting down there and he could see the water shining on her legs, and he started to put his hand out and she just smiled and looked friendly, her eyelids drooping a little. And then he sighed like a kid trying out the cookie jar once more that they had put the mouse trap in once, and his hands started to move in a vague clumsy hope over —

The scream ripped into him. He was trying to roll away before the knives of the screaming cut him to pieces. He was on his knees and his breath was sighing and wheezing. She was standing there crouched a little, pointing at him. The cords in her neck stood out and she was screaming and laughing at the same time and backing away from him.

"You goddamned fat slob! Get away from me!"

"Don't say that!"

"You hog! You big fat stinking hog!"

He had her neck and he had her clear into the water and he was twisting and twisting at her neck before she could move. These times he moved fast, faster than anybody would ever think he could move, and he had her neck and he was going to twist her goddamned yap-

ping head right off of her neck.

He heard the sound dimly and glanced up and saw the shining red of the Ford through the trees. Why — why that looked just like Pete Huey's Ford —

They came out of the trees and were all over him before he could move. He slipped on the wet stones and the heavy lumbermen's shoe caught him in the face. He fell and started to roll a little back toward the water, and he could hear the woman sobbing and yelling at him. He felt the arm around his neck holding him and he felt his flesh slipping and sweating as they held his head there so the three guys who had been playing blackjack by the Schlitz beer sign could punch him in the face and belly and in the groin.

The heavy lumbermen's shoes were connecting with his ribs and his belly and his head as he tried to roll away.

Why — why that was Pete Huey there — wasn't that Pete Huey?

Yes, that was Pete Huey. And the other three guys had shirts on now, and one of them had a badge on his shirt.

Pete was over there with his arms around the girl and he was patting her on the shoulder. They were real friendly with one another. "Guess you got all the proof you want now ain't you, Sheriff?" Pete Huey was saying.

"Almost," the man with the badge on his shirt was saying. He was squat-

ting down and twisting Frank's head up by the hair. "Now, you murdering bastard, how many others did you strangle and leave buried along the road somewhere?"

Frank tried to twist his head around so he could talk. The blood was running down his throat.

"We know about two of 'em, you bastard. They wouldn't have been found except for an accident. They found Lucille up stream here because they was dynamiting the rocks to build a little dam to make a swimming pool. And some kids fooling around in a cave up around Desert Springs found the other one, someone named Dolores. So how many others are there, you bastard?"

The sheriff pulled out a rusty nail clipper and a pencil flashlight and held them up to Frank's face. "There are your specialties, aren't they, fatty? You left the nail clipper in the cave with the one up at Desert Springs. You left the pencil flashlight with the one you killed up stream here a ways."

He didn't remember leaving them. Compliments of Big Frank . . .

"The stinking hog," he heard the girl saying. "He tried to put his hands on me!"

"You did fine, honey," Pete Huey was saying. "You were sure brave. But we caught the bastard red-handed."

"He was gonna kill me!"

"How many others have you killed?" the sheriff asked.

He couldn't remember. He just couldn't remember, and anyway he was getting sleepier every minute, sleepier and heavier lying there . . .

"What the hell difference does that make," Pete Huey said sharply. "They're dead. He killed Lucille, Sheriff. He killed my sister last trip, and that's all I give a damn about! He's going to die for it, Sheriff. You said he would. We made that agreement. You know what'll happen if you take him in. Some smart lawyer will say he's crazy and he'll get off. Sure, he's crazy, but that don't mean anything to me. Come on, Sheriff. Let's get the bastard out of here . . ."

"Well, all right," the sheriff said. "But I ought to find out how many there are —"

"The hell with them, Sheriff. Remember — all we got to do is say he tried to get away in his Buick, that's all."

They drove both cars out there, about fifty miles off into the desert, driving along through the sagebrush over the narrow winding graveled road that went past an old mine that hadn't been worked for over ten years.

Pete Huey and the woman and two of the guys who had played blackjack drove Frank out there in Frank's car. And the Sheriff and the other guy came along behind them in Pete Huey's red Ford.

Frank got sleepier and sleepier.

Dimly he could see the jackrabbits hopping away out of sight in the sagebrush. The sagebrush got thinner and finally you couldn't see anything but some sandstone and sand and gravel as far as you could look.

They would just drive the red Ford back and say Frank had gotten away in his Buick, and . . . but he was too sleepy to care . . .

They had to drag him out of the car. Pete Huey kept hitting him but he wouldn't take off his clothes, and finally they tore his clothes off.

"We'll bring the clothes back out," Pete Huey said, "and say he went nuts and tore them off himself."

He lay there looking up at the sky, feeling his eyelids getting heavier and heavier. The chilled desert night wouldn't matter. The sun in the morning wouldn't matter either, he thought, no matter how hot it got, no matter if there wasn't any shade, and no place to go, and the sun would get hotter and hotter . . . it wouldn't matter because he would be sound asleep.

By eleven o'clock in the morning it was a hundred and thirty degrees in the shade but there wasn't any shade. And when they brought Big Frank in to Crowell's Mortuary at Desert Springs that next afternoon, people said he looked like a big par-boiled hog.





I'll Do Anything

*He'd have to do whatever they
told him — even murder.*

BY CHARLES BEAUMONT

TODAY Mrs. Martinez did not practice on the organ, so St. Christopher's was full of the quiet that made Julio feel strange and afraid. He hated this feeling, and, when he touched the sponge in the fountain of Holy Water — brittle and gray-caked, like an old woman's wrist — he thought of sitting alone

in the big church and decided that tomorrow would be time enough to pray. Making the Sign of the Cross, he put a dime and two pennies into the poor box and went back down the stone stairs.

The rain was not much. It drifted in fine mist from the high iron-colored clouds, freckling the dry

streets briefly, then disappearing.

Julio wished that it would rain or that it would not rain.

He hurried over to the young man who was still leaning against the fender of a car, still cleaning his fingernails with a pocket knife. The young man looked up, surprised.

"Let's go," Julio said, and they started to walk.

"That was a quickie," the young man said.

Julio didn't answer. He should have gone in and prayed, and then he wouldn't be so scared now. He thought of the next few hours, of Paco and what would be said if it were known how scared he really was.

"I could say your mom got sick, or something. That's what Shark pulled and he got out of it, remember."

"So?"

"So nothing."

Danny Arriaga was Julio's best friend. You can't hide things from your best friend. Besides, Danny was older, old enough to start a mustache, and he'd been around: he had even been in trouble with a woman once, and there was a child, which had shocked Julio at first, though now he was filled with great envy. Danny was smart, and hard. He'd take over, some day. So Julio would have to pretend.

"Look, I'm sorry — okay by you?"

"Okay by me, Julio."

"I'm nervous is all. Can't a guy get nervous without he's chicken?"

They walked silently for a while. The heat of the sun and the half-rain had left the evening airless and sticky, and both boys were perspiring. They wore faded blue jeans which hung tight to their legs, and leather flying jackets. Their hair was deep black, straight and profuse, climbing down their necks to a final point on each; shoes brightly shined, T-shirts grimy and speckled with holes.

They walked across the sidewalk to a lawn, down the lawn's incline to the artificial lake and along the lake's edge. There were no boats out yet.

"Danny," Julio said, "why do you suppose Paco picked me?"

Danny Arriaga shrugged. "Your turn."

"Yeah, but what's it going to be?"

"For you, one thing, for another guy, something else. Who knows? It's all what Paco dreams up."

Julio stopped when he saw that they were approaching the boat-house. "I don't want to do it, I'm chicken — right?"

Danny shrugged again and took out a cigarette. "I told you what I would've told Paco, but you didn't want to. Now it's too late."

"Gimme a bomb," Julio said.

For the first time, suddenly, as he wondered what he had to do tonight, he remembered a crazy old man he had laughed at once in his father's pharmacy on San Julian Street and how hurt his father had

been because the old man was a shell-shock case from the first world war and couldn't help his infirmity. He felt like the old man now.

"Better not fool around like this," Danny said, "or Paco'll start wondering."

"Let him wonder! All right, all right."

They continued along the edge of the lake. It was almost dark now, and presently they came to the rear door of the park's boat-house. Danny looked at Julio once, stamped out his cigarette and rapped on the door.

"Check the playboys," somebody said, opening the door.

"Cram it," Danny said. "We got held up."

"That's a switch."

Julio began to feel sick in his stomach.

They were all there. And Julio knew why: to see if he would chicken out.

Lined up against the far wall, Gerry Sanchez, Jesus Rivera, Manuel Morales and his two little brothers who always tagged along wherever Manuel went; seated in two of the battery boats, Hernando and Juan Verdugo and Albert Vallera. All silent.

In the center of the big room was Paco.

Julio gestured a greeting with his hand, and immediately began to fear the eyes turned on him.

'Paco' Maria Christobal y Mendez was a powerfully muscled, dark and dark-haired youth of seventeen. He sat tipped back in a wicker chair, with his arms stretched behind his head, staring at Julio, squinting through the cigarette smoke.

"What, you stop in a museum on the way?" Paco said. Everybody laughed. Julio laughed.

"What are you talking? I'm not as late as all that."

"Forty-five minutes is too late." Paco reached to the table and moved a bottle forward.

"Speech me," Julio said. "Speech me."

"Hey, listen, you guys! Listen. Julio's cracking wise."

"Who's cracking wise? Look, so I'm here, so what should I do?"

Danny was looking at his shoes.

Paco rubbed his face. It glistened with hot sweat and was inflamed where the light beard had caused irritations. "Got a hot job for Julio tonight," he said. "Know what it is?"

"How should I know?" Julio tried hard to keep his voice steady.

"Great kidders, you English," Paco said. "Hey, you guys, he don't know." He looked over at Danny Arriaga. "You didn't tell him?"

"For Chrissakes," Danny said.

"All right, all right, so. You still want in The Aces?"

Julio nodded.

"By which means you got to do whatever I say you got to do, no matter what, right? Okay." Paco

drank from the bottle and passed it to Manuel Morales, who drank and gave the bottle to the younger of his brothers, who only wet his lips and gave it back.

Julio knew he'd have to wait, because he remembered Albert's initiation, and how Paco had stalled and watched to see how scared he got. They'd sent Albert to swipe a car that was owned by the manager of Pacific Fruit who always left the key in. That wasn't so bad, even if Albert did wreck the car the same night, driving it back to the club. Swiping a car would be all right.

But from the way Danny looked, it wasn't going to be anything like that. Paco had it in for him ever since he found out about his going to Church. Though there must be more to it, because Julio knew that Hernando and Juan went to Church, too.

Something deep and strange, hard to figure.

But strong.

"Pretty soon it's time," Paco said, leaning back in the chair. The others were smiling.

The boats rocked uneasily in the small currents, a short drifting.

Julio thought about Paco, about how he'd come to The Aces. It was Danny who joined first, long before, even before Julio was wearing jeans. Paco was later, a new guy on the street. Mr. Mendez was dead, and his mother worked in the Chinese grocery on Aliso Street with the dead cats in the window. No organi-

zation to the club, then. Paco moved in and organized. He beat up Vincente Santa Cruz, who was the strongest guy in the Heights, and he introduced the guys to marijuana and showed them where to get it. He'd been booked three times at the jail and was seen with girls tagging after him, even though he wasn't good looking, only strong and powerful. Danny admired Paco. Julio didn't, but he respected him.

"Charge up, kid," Paco opened a pill box which contained four crude cigarettes.

"Afterwards," Julio said.

"So okay. Afterwards." Paco grinned and winked at the others.

There was silence again: only the water sloshing against the boats and the painful creak of the wicker chair straining back and forth.

The room was large. "The Aces" was whitewashed on the walls, and initials were carved in various places. Except Julio's. His were not on any of the walls. That distinction would come only when he'd finished his job.

No one seemed prepared to break the quiet.

Julio thought, Danny knows. He knew all along, but he wouldn't tell me. Danny was a full-fledged member now. He'd had to break the windows out of Major Jewelry and swipe enough watches for the gang. A tough assignment, because of the cops who prowled and wandered around all the time. It took nerve. Julio had broken into a store him-

self, though — a tire shop — and so he knew he could do it again, although he remembered how afraid he had been.

Why wouldn't they tell him, for Chrissakes? Why stall? If they'd only tell him now, he'd go right out, he was sure. But, any later . . .

"Scared?" Paco asked, lighting another cigarette and taking off his jacket.

"Listen close — you'll hear me shaking," Julio said.

Danny smiled.

Paco frowned and brought his chair forward with a loud noise.

"What are you so cocky — I'll give you in the mouth in a minute. I asked a question."

"No. I ain't scared."

"That's a crock. Who you trying to kid, anyway? Me?"

Suddenly Julio hated this leering, posturing Paco as he had never hated a person before. He looked at his friend Danny, but Danny was looking elsewhere.

"Mackerel snapper, isn't it, Julio?" Paco scratched his leg loudly. "What did you, go to confession today or was the priest busy in the back room?" He smiled.

Julio clenched his fists. "Give me to do, already," he said; and all at once, he thought of his father, Papa Velasquez. Papa would be working late right now, in the pharmacy, mixing sodas and prescriptions. Business was very good, with the new housing project and all the new trade.

Julio was going to be a pharmacist: everyone knew that, though no one believed it. No one but Father Laurent: he talked to Julio many times, softly, understandingly. And there were many times when Julio wanted to tell the priest what he had done — about the motorcycle, or the time he helped the guys push tea — but he could never seem to get the words out.

He waited, hands tight together, listening to the breathing, and thinking: I could go right to the drug-store now, if I wanted. It's only a mile away . . .

He cleared his throat. Albert Valera was staring at him.

And now Danny was getting sore, too: Julio could tell.

"You want to know, huh? Guys — think I should tell him?"

"Tell him already," Danny snapped, rising to his feet. He looked a lot bigger than Paco, suddenly. "Now."

"Who asked for your mouth?" Paco said, glaring. He looked quickly away. "All right, Julio. But first you got to see this."

Paco reached in his pocket and took out a large bone-handled knife. Julio didn't move.

"Ever use one, kid?"

"Yeah."

"Hey, no lie? What do you think, guys — Julio's an expert!" Paco pressed a button on the knife with his thumb. A long silver blade flashed out, glittering in the greenish light of the boat-house.

“So?”

“So you’re going to use it tonight, Julio,” Paco said, grinning broadly and rocking in the chair. The others crouched and held their cigarettes in their mouths.

Danny seemed about to speak up, but he held himself in check.

“On what?” Julio asked.

“No, kid — not on *what*. On *who*.” Paco flipped the knife toward Julio’s foot, but it landed handle-down and slid into a corner. Julio picked it up, pressed the button, folded back the blade, and put the knife in his pocket.

“All right, *who*? On *who*?”

He remembered what the Kats had done to the old woman over on Pregunta. For eighty-three cents.

“A dirty louse that’s got it coming,” Paco said. He waited. “Hey, kid, what’s wrong? You look sick.”

“What are you talking, for Chris-sakes. What do you want I should do?”

“Carry out a very important job for our group, that’s what. You’re a very important man, Julio Velasquez. Know that?”

Near Cuernavaca, by the caverns of Cacahuamilpa, Grandfather had seen a man lying still in the bushes. The man was dead. But not only that — he had been dead for a long time. Grandfather used to sit after the coffee and tell about it; and it was always terrifying because Grandfather had a quiet way of talking, without emphasis, without excitement.

— “¿Quien fue el hombre, Papa?”

— “¿Quien? Un hombre muy importante en el pueblo!”

Always; then the slow description, unrolling like one of Mama’s string-balls. The man had been a rich one of the village, influential and well liked, owner of a beautiful hacienda, over two thousand acres of land. Then one night he didn’t come back when he should have, and the next night it was the same, and the next night, and after the searches, he was forgotten. It was Grandfather who found him. But the flies and the vultures had found him first.

— “¿Como murio el hombre?” He had been murdered. The knife was still between his ribs and the flesh had softened and decayed around the knife.

Death . . .

Julio always thought of death as the rich man from Cuernavaca.

“What’d he do?” Julio asked. “This guy.”

“He got to *do* something?” Paco said, laughing. Then: “Plenty. You know when we all went to the Orpheum the other night and you had to stay home on account of your old man or something?”

“Yeah. Sure.”

“Okay. They got Billy Daniels, and a picture that’s supposed to be good, y’know? Okay, we start to pay when the chick at the window picks up the phone and says, ‘Wait a minute.’ Pretty soon the brass comes out and starts to look us over, real cool, see, like he had a bug up or something. I talk to him and it’s all right — we go in. Five goddam

dollars. So — the show stinks, the movie: it's but cornball, and we go to get our loot back. Guy at the window now, no broad. He says 'No.' I ask to see the manager, but he's gone. They won't give us back our loot. What do we do? What would *you* do, Julio?"

"Raise a stink."

"You bet your life. That's what we do, what happens? Big punk comes barreling down the aisle, says he's the assistant manager. We got to blow, see. But no loot, no, man. Then he took Albert by the hair and kicked him. Right, Albert?"

Albert nodded.

"So naturally this isn't for The Aces. I didn't say nothing after that, except I let the punk know he'd get his, later on. So we just casually walked out. And here's the thing —" Paco's eyes narrowed dramatically. "That louse is still walking around, Julio, like he never done a thing to nobody, like he never insulted all of us. Know what he said? Know what he called us, Julio?"

"What'd he call you?"

"Pachooks. Wetbacks. Dirty Mex rats. Shot his mouth off like that in front of everybody in the show."

"So you want him cut up?"

Paco rocked and smiled. "No, not just cut up. I want that one dead, where he can't talk any more. That's your assignment, Julio. Bring back his ears."

Julio glanced at Danny, who was not smiling. The others were very quiet. They all looked at him.

"When's he get off?" Julio asked, finally.

"Ten-thirty. He walks down Los Angeles Street, then he hits Third, down Third till he's around the junction. It's a break, Julio. We followed him for three nights, and there's never anybody around the junction. Get him when he's passing the boon docks over to Alameda. Nobody'll ever see you."

"How will I know him?"

"Fat slob. Big nose, big ears, curly brown hair. Carries something, maybe his lunch-pail — you might bring that back with you. Albert'll go along and point him out, in case he wants to give you trouble. He's big, but you can take him."

Julio felt the knife in his pocket. He nodded.

"All right, so this is it. You and Albert take off in half an hour, wait and hang around the loading docks, but make sure nobody sees you. Then check the time and grab a spot behind the track next to Merchant Truck — you know where it is. He'll pass there around eleven. All right?"

Julio reached for the pill box and controlled his fingers as they removed the last cigarette. Paco grinned.

"So in the meantime, let's have our meeting. Whoever got what, lay it out on the floor."

The boys began reaching into bags and parcels, and into their pockets, and taking out watches and rings and handfuls of money. These items they spread on the floor.

The rich man, Julio thought, lying still in the bushes, with his fat dead face, waiting for the flies, waiting, while a little Mexican boy with red wet hands runs away, fast, fast . . .

The grating sound of heavy machinery being pushed across cement came muffled through the wooden doors of the freight dock. There were a few indistinct voices, and the distant hum of other machines that never stopped working.

The night was still airless. Julio and Albert Vallera walked along the vacant land by the boxcar, clinging to the shadows and speaking little.

Finally Julio said, "This guy really do all that that Paco said?"

"He got smart," Albert said.

"Kick you?"

"You could call it that. Just as good."

"So what kind of a stink you guys raise to cause all that?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing my foot."

"Aah, you know Paco. He got mad at the picture and started to horse around. Dropped a beer bottle off of the balcony or something, I don't know."

"Then this guy booted you guys out?"

"Yeah."

"Did Paco give him a fight?"

"No," Albert said, thoughtfully. They climbed up the side of a car and jumped from the top to the ground. "He's too smart for that.

They would of called the cops and all that kind of stuff. This way's better."

"Yeah."

"Nervous?"

"Yeah, real nervous. I'm dying to death, I'm so nervous. Listen — when I get through tonight, Paco and all the rest of you guys better lay off me."

"Don't worry."

"So what is it?"

"Twenty of. This is the place — he went by right over there."

Julio wondered if Albert could hear his heart. And if Albert could read his thoughts . . .

He felt the greasy knife handle slip in his hands, so he took it out and wiped it on his trousers and tested it. He pushed the point of the blade into the soft wood of a car, pretending it was the punk's neck.

He pulled the knife out and didn't do that any more.

They sat on the cindery ground beside a huge iron wheel.

"Really a rat, huh?" Julio said.

"The most," Albert said.

"How old?"

"Who knows — twenty-five, thirty. You can't tell with them."

"You don't suppose he — I mean this guy — you don't think he's got a family or anything like that, do you?"

"What the hell kind of a thing is that to say? Christ, no! Who'd marry a greaseball slob like that?" Albert laughed softly, and took from his leather jacket pocket a red-

handled knife that had to be operated manually. He opened it and began to clean his fingernails. Every two or three seconds he glanced up toward the dark unpaved street.

"So nobody's going to miss *him*, right?" Julio said.

"No. We're going to all break down and cry. What's the matter, you chickening out? If you are, I ain't going to sit here all —"

Julio clutched Albert's shirt-front and gathered it in his fist. "Shut up. You hear? Shut your goddam face about that stuff or I'll break it for you."

"Shhh, quiet down . . . we'll talk later. Let's go. If you want to spoil everything, just keep shooting off your mouth."

Julio felt the perspiration course down his legs. He tried to stop the shudder.

"Okay," he said.

On tracks a mile distant a string of freight cars lumbered clumsily out of a siding, punching with heavy sounds at the night. There were tiny human noises, too, like small birds high out of sight. Otherwise, there was only his own breathing.

"I want to hear 'mackerel snapper' when this is over," Julio said.

"You ain't done nothing yet," Albert said, looking away quickly.

"Wait," Julio said. But his voice started to crack, so he forced a yawn and stretched out his legs. "So when the hell we going to get a goddam cycle?" he said.

Albert didn't answer.

"Kind of a gang is this, anyway, we don't have any goddam cycles?"

"Five of. He ought to be along pretty quick now."

Julio grinned, closed his knife, reopened it with a swift soft click, closed it again. His hands were moist and the knife-handle was coated with a grimy sweat which made it slippery. He wiped it carefully along the sides of his jeans.

"The Kats have got cycles. Five, for Chrissakes."

"Kats, schmats," Albert said. "Knock it off, will you?"

"What's the matter, Albert? Don't tell me you're scared!"

Albert drew back his fist and hit Julio's shoulder, then quickly put a finger to his lips. "Shhh!"

They listened.

It was nothing.

"Hey, little boy, hey, *Albert* know what?" Julio combed his hair. "Know what I know? Paco, he don't think I'll do it. He wants you and I to come back so he can give with the big man routine. He don't think I'll do it."

Albert looked interested.

"He's real sharp. Having a great big ball right now. Where's it going to put him when we get back with this guy's ears?" Julio laughed.

In the stillness, footsteps rang sharply on the ground, but ponderously as gravel was crunched and stones were sent snapping.

The footsteps grew louder.

Albert listened, then he rose slowly and brushed the dirt from his jeans.

He opened his knife, looked at Julio and Julio got up. They hunched close by the shadow of the boxcar.

The steps were irregular, and for a moment Julio thought it sounded like a woman. For another moment he heard Grandfather's words and saw the carrion in the bushes.

The images scattered and disappeared.

"Dumb jerk don't know what he's walking into, right?" Julio whispered. The words frightened him. Albert wasn't moving. "Wetbacks. Greasers. Mex — right? Okay. Okay, Albert? Okay." The blade sprang out of the handle.

"Shut up," Albert whispered. "There he is. See him?"

There were no streetlamps, so the figure was indistinct. In the darkness it could be determined that the figure was that of a man: heavy-set, not old, walking slowly, almost as if he were afraid of something.

"That's him," Albert said, letting out a stream of breath.

Julio's throat was dry. It pained him when he tried to swallow. "Okay," he said.

Albert said, "Okay, look. Go up and pretend you want a hand-out, you know? Make it good. Then let him have it, right away."

"I thought I saw something," Julio said.

"Where?"

"I couldn't make out."

"Who you bulling? You want to go back?"

"All right, so I was wrong."

The figure had passed the boxcar and disappeared into shadows, but the footsteps were still clear.

"You ready?" Albert said.

Julio thought of going back. Of what would be said, of all the eyes turned on him like ominous spotlights. The laughter he heard was what he hated most.

"Hell," Julio said. "You coming with, or not?" He put the knife up his sleeve and held it there with his palm cupped underneath.

Albert rubbed his hands along his shirt. "All right, I'll follow you — about a minute. Sixty seconds."

Julio listened. Suddenly he didn't tremble any more, though his throat was still dry. There were no more pictures in his mind.

He waited, counting.

Then he smiled at Albert and started to walk.

It would take only a few minutes, he thought. No one will see. No one will give Julio Velasquez the old line about chicken after this. No one will see . . .

Up ahead, he could see the man. No one else: just the man who was a louse and who didn't deserve to live.

And the long shadows.

At last he caught up with the man.

"Hey, mister," Julio said.



One at a Time



Lottie's husbands kept disappearing. After a while, people started to wonder why . . .

*A True Story From
Actual Case Records*

BY ANDREW J. BURRIS

LOTTIE FREEMAN had everything a country girl could ask for. She was young, beautiful, and — by the standards of Cumberland County, Maine — rich. Her parents had died

and left her a prosperous farm, and, naturally enough, she was the belle of the county. She had her pick of eligible males, and finally chose a man named William Sanborn. Lottie

became Mrs. Sanborn and, now that her husband was helping to run the farm, she became even richer.

A year passed — and then gossip started. Lottie, the town whispered, was running around with other men. Home life just wasn't enough for this beauty. The rumors grew, and, while the more skeptical townspeople didn't accept the idea at first, the rumors were hard to deny after a while.

Then, in the summer of 1910, William Sanborn disappeared. In tears, Lottie explained that he'd forged her name to some notes, been unable to meet them, and run away, unable to face the shame of exposure before the townsfolk.

The rest of the Sanborn family didn't take very kindly to this explanation — but there wasn't anything they could do about it. The rumors continued to spread, particularly after Lottie hired a new man for work on the farm. The man, said the gossipers, was paying as much attention to the bereaved Mrs. Sanborn as he was to the farm itself.

Perhaps the hired man didn't like such rumors. At any rate, he disappeared, too, one night. Nobody ever saw or heard of him again.

The same thing happened with another hired man Lottie took on. And then, in 1915, she met Alphonse Cote.

She became Mrs. Cote almost immediately, having obtained a divorce from Sanborn on the grounds of desertion. She seemed to settle down

to a placid life on her farm, surrounded by her four children, her loving husband, the farm workers . . .

Nine years later, in 1924, Lottie walked into the sheriff's office and announced that Alphonse had disappeared. It seemed that he had taken \$200 from Lottie, packed a suitcase, and gone off. The sheriff was quite willing to put out a dragnet and arrest Alphonse, but Lottie said she didn't want that. She only wanted to post a reward, "to stop the gossips from talking about me."

But that phrase started Deputy Sheriff Norton wondering. He was new in town, and he hadn't heard any of the old gossip about Lottie. He went out and, just out of curiosity, dredged up the old stories.

When he found out that four men had disappeared without a trace from her farm, the Deputy Sheriff got busy. He checked with the Cote family in Toronto and discovered that Alphonse had not gone there. But Fred Cote, the missing man's brother, came to Maine to talk to the Deputy.

"This woman says Alphonse took the money because his temper got the best of him," Fred said. "But Alphonse didn't have a bad temper. Something is fishy."

At that point Deputy Norton was ready to agree. He'd discovered something interesting in the old story of William Sanborn. Sanborn had been a careful dresser — yet he'd left all his best clothing behind when

he'd disappeared, taking with him only the old work clothes in which he'd been dressed.

Norton did a little questioning. Lottie insisted that Alphonse Cote had been a "brute," and she was corroborated by her teen-age son, Ralph, and by a plumber named Charles Fielding who was spending his vacation on the farm.

That seemed to be that, in spite of Fred Cote's statement. But Norton wasn't quite satisfied. He did a little investigating on his own, looking around Lottie's farm, and, behind the barn, he discovered a small pile of ashes, some burned fragments of cloth and leather. He asked Lottie about this and she said it was probably something the children had burned.

Norton listened to some more rumor. A few neighbors reported having heard gunfire at the farm the night Cote had disappeared. By now the facts were spelling out a pattern to the Deputy. Sanborn's "disappearance" without his Sunday clothes had been a mistake, and Lottie didn't make the same mistake twice. So when Cote "disappeared," she made sure that his Sunday clothes and a suitcase disappeared with him. Norton thought about the burnt cloth and leather. It began to add up.

He called Lottie in for questioning and got nowhere. He didn't have anything like real evidence to work with, and a hunch just wasn't good enough to crack the pretty farm

woman. Norton gave up on her.

He questioned Charles Fielding and got no farther, but then he called in Lottie's son Ralph.

"You might as well know," Norton told the boy. "Fielding confessed."

Ralph sat still for a second. Then he started to talk.

He'd had to do what his mother told him, he said. Fielding had done the actual shooting, and had buried Cote's body on the farm. The next day, the grave had been plowed over. Everything had been done under Lottie's direction, Ralph insisted; he hadn't wanted to do it.

Fielding, though, had a different excuse. "I loved her," he told Norton. "I was going to marry her when she got rid of her husband."

Norton didn't point out that becoming Lottie's husband was just about tantamount to suicide. He put Fielding, young Ralph and Lottie under arrest instead.

At the trial, only Fielding was sentenced. Lottie had died in jail, and Ralph, the jury decided, had been "unduly influenced" by his mother and wasn't responsible for his part in the crime.

But that only cleared up the death of Alphonse Cote, legally. William Sanborn, two hired men, and how many others — nobody knows to this day — are planted among the rows of vegetables, in the rich ground, on that farm Lottie Freeman ran.



No matter what happened, he wasn't going back to the ship. He'd rather be killed than go back . . .

Time to Kill

HE LAY on the side of the mountain now, with his elbows digging into the soft grey ash, and the binoculars trained out over the harbor. The destroyer sat like a slim silver slug on the water, and he could hear the sound of the bo'sun's whistle calling a clean



A Novelette

BY RICHARD MARSTEN

sweep down fore and aft. The sound traveled on the brittle air, climbed the steep sides of Mt. Sakura-Shima, and he listened with a strange detached feeling within him, and then shifted the binoculars.

The LCPR squatted on the water's edge, its ramp down. It bobbed gently on the waves, like a wayward dark bottle. He could make out Mr. Andrews standing near the ramp with the muster sheet in his hands, checking off the men's names as they climbed aboard. One of the men stopped to chat with Mr. Andrews, lighting a cigarette with a silver lighter that caught the dying rays of the sun and sent them scattering like a shell burst.

He wondered if the sun would reflect off the lenses of his binoculars, and quickly shaded them with one hand.

They would be leaving soon, of course. Or at least he hoped so. He did not think they'd hold the landing craft for him. The skipper of the LCPR probably had his own orders, and this ferrying job was undoubtedly a favor to the Old Man. Besides, there were the other men. They'd have to get back to the ship, and he couldn't visualize the whole operation being held up because of him. No, the boat would leave, of that he was certain.

Perhaps they would leave a search party behind, though. He didn't like that idea. It meant he would have to be careful, and fast. Careful first, and fast second. Well, he was prepared. He had a thousand dollars in yen, and a knapsack full of civilian clothes. This mountain climbing farce had really been a godsend. It had provided the means for getting off the ship with the

clothes he needed. He smiled and silently thanked the Old Man for being such a thoughtful guy.

Most of the men were aboard the landing craft now. A few stragglers still wandered down the side of the mountain, and he saw Mr. Andrews wave his arm at them, hurrying them on. The men kept their leisurely pace, still enjoying the holiday spirit, the enjoyment of a day away from the ship. They ambled over to Mr. Andrews, and he checked off their names on the muster sheet, and then looked toward the mountain again. Beyond Mr. Andrews, and across the bay, the tiled roofs of the town of Kago-shima caught the last feeble rays of the sun. Mr. Andrews glanced at his wrist watch anxiously, looked at the muster sheet again, and then turned to face the mountain.

Two more men hurried toward the waiting LCPR, and Mr. Andrews put his hands on his hips and chewed them out, and then checked off their names on the muster sheet and pointed angrily toward the ramp. He consulted the sheet again, looked at his watch, and then started toward the ramp himself. He climbed aboard the boat with long strides, looked around among the milling men for a few moments, and then walked rapidly toward one group.

That will be Marchetti, Thompson thought. He adjusted the binoculars, tightening the focus. Yes, that's Marchetti with his red hair spilling from under his hat. Mr.

Andrews will be asking about me now. He'll say *Marchetti, one of your goddamned radarmen is missing*. And Marchetti will look up surprised — there, he's doing it now, and say *Which one, sir?*

Mr. Andrews pointed toward the mountain, shaking his forefinger at it. He pulled his hand back and pointed to the muster sheet, and Marchetti looked first at the sheet and then at the mountain, and then he nodded gravely. Marchetti was a Radarman First Class. He'd been in the Navy a long time now, and he'd learned to take the rantings of officers in stride. He'd tell Mr. Andrews *Hell, sir, Thompson will be along any minute now. Probably stopped to rest.*

Thompson smiled as he saw Mr. Andrews nod and walk down the ramp again. From the destroyer in the harbor, a searchlight began blinking. Someone on the bridge of the landing craft acknowledged, and the signalman on the destroyer began sending rapidly.

They wanted to know what the delay was. Thompson read the Morse and smiled, picturing the Old Man on the bridge, pacing up and down, a cup of black coffee in his browned hands. *This is really going to set you up fine, isn't it, Captain?* he thought. *This is really going to cook your fat goose with ComDesDiv, isn't it? You'll never get that fat third stripe now, will you?*

The LCPR flashed a received sign, and a wait, and then Thomp-

son saw a man start down from the bridge, crossing the deck and walking down the ramp to Mr. Andrews. He spoke to Mr. Andrews, and then both of them started up the ramp, across the deck again, and onto the bridge.

Now the fun starts, Thompson thought.

Someone on the landing craft swung the light so that Thompson could not read it. He cursed silently and waited for the destroyer's answer.

He read the blinking light. I-M-I. Repeat.

Thompson almost laughed aloud. The Old Man probably couldn't believe it the first time. He waited until the LCPR finished sending, and then trained the binoculars on the bridge of the destroyer. There was a long pause, and then the message came.

RETURN TO SHIP AS SCHEDULED. LT. JG ANDREWS AND FOUR MEN WAIT ASHORE. IF THOMPSON RETURNS, NOTIFY SHIP AND BOAT WILL BE SENT. IF NOT, SEEK SHELTER, RETURN TO SHIP IN MORNING. PICK-UP BOAT AT 0600. WILL ORGANIZE SEARCH PARTY THEN.

Thompson did not wait for more. He put the binoculars back into their case, and then stuffed the case into the knapsack. From the knapsack, he took a pair of grey flannel trousers and a green shirt. He put these on hurriedly, and then pulled off his shoes and socks. *That's where they catch you*, he thought. *The black*

shoes and socks. A dead giveaway. He pulled on a pair of pale green socks, laced the brown cordovans, and then stood up. He took a long pull of water from his canteen, put the canteen and his Navy dungarees into the knapsack, and then stuffed his black shoes and socks into the pack, too.

There, he thought. Now I'm a full-fledged deserter.

He started down the mountain.

2.

It had really been ridiculously simple. He knew that now as he worked his way down over the loose ash, heading for the deeply cut road in the face of the mountain.

The notice had been posted on the quarterdeck bulletin board, two days after they'd arrived in Kagoshima. They'd come from Sasebo, and were here to pick up some top army brass. There'd been an Army delay, and the Old Man had discovered that Kagoshima boasted a mountain. Not only a mountain, but a volcano with two craters. One crater was dead, and the other hissed live steam every eight minutes. The mountain was not a high one. It was, in fact, ridiculously low. No special equipment would be needed for the climb, and since the live crater had not erupted in a very long time, the Old Man figured it was a perfectly safe venture.

He'd had the notice posted, stating that the climbing expedition

was being organized for all watch sections with liberty the next day. Thompson's heart had quickened when he'd read the notice. This was what he'd been waiting for. This was his opportunity. He'd spoken to Marchetti, asking if he might switch liberty with one of the other men. Marchetti had shrugged and agreed, and Thompson had found a man who wasn't particularly interested in mountain climbing. The switch had gone through, and the party left the ship the next morning at 0700. The ship provided sandwiches and beer, and the climb had taken on every aspect of a club outing. It had not been difficult.

There were roads cut into the roots of the mountain, and they were easy to follow, only slightly inclined. When the roads dwindled into trails, it became a little more difficult, but it was still nothing to worry about. It got harder when the trails ended, and the party was working on a sharp incline with nothing but loose ash under their feet. But the ash soon gave way to a light covering of snow, and they reached the peak, crossed the dead crater, looked at the hissing steam for a while, and then ate their sandwiches and drank their beer.

Thompson had lost himself on the way down. He'd lagged behind the other radarmen, and then dodged into a thin layer of brush. He'd stayed there motionless while the rest of the party worked its way back down to the beach again.

It had been that simple.

He walked easily now. He'd left the ash behind him, and soon he'd hit the road. There were homes lining that road. He'd seen them on the way up. He'd stay in one of those homes for the night, and maybe start out again in the morning, before the search party got under way. Or would that be wise?

Perhaps he should stay longer, at least until the ship left. He'd want to get to Tokyo, of course. There were a good many civilians there, and he could probably get by unnoticed. He knew the language well, and he shouldn't have too much trouble. Once in Tokyo, he'd make further plans, maybe for getting out of the country entirely. But that could wait. For now, he needed a house for the night.

The trail became the road, shoulder high on each side, cut deep into the earth. He followed the road down, passing the lighted houses on either side of it. There was a great feeling of freedom within him, a feeling he had not known for a long time. He thought of the ship fleetingly.

The LCPR was probably there by this time. The men would be climbing the ladder and saluting the ensign — no, the flag would have been taken in already. The OD would take them aboard, and they'd drift to their compartments and maybe hit the sack or maybe wait up for the movie that would be shown on the boat deck. The movie would

stop after each reel, while the man at the projector changed reels and put in a new one. *How enjoyable*, he thought.

He was glad to be away from it. Not only the routine, not only that. Not just early reveille and beans for breakfast or soggy pancakes. Not just quarters for muster, or work stations (slop, slop, slop with the bucket and rag — wash it, scrape it, paint it — wash it, scrape it, paint it again), not just that. Nor the confining art of living with other men in close quarters. Nor the whistles that governed his life, nor the watches at the Sugar George, the thin orange line sweeping over 360°, over and over again, the pips lighting up like glowworms on the screen. Nor the queasy feeling in his stomach whenever they were under way. None of that, but all of it.

All the garbage, and all the servile bowing and scraping to officers and petty officers and anyone you wanted something from.

And, of course, the other thing.

The fact that the ship was not going home.

He faced this honestly. He had expected to go home as soon as the Korean truce had been signed. Instead, the ship was still drifting around, picking up assorted brass here and there, taking them to Pearl and then getting under way again to pick up more men. Just like a goddamned ferry. He'd seen other ships heading back for the

States and the knowledge had galled him.

He'd have waited, possibly even stuck the thing out until his time was up. But not now. Not when he knew they'd be frolicking all over the damned Pacific for God knew how long. No, you can take only so much shoving around. If you don't bend, you break. He hadn't bent, and he wasn't going to break. The mountain-climbing opportunity had simply moved his resolve into action.

Now he was free.

Free.

The word rang in his head. He breathed of the air deeply, the same aroma on it, the aroma that lingered over every Japanese town he'd seen. A combination of wood-smoke and fish, an aroma that was reminiscent of Autumn back home, no matter what the season here.

He liked Japan, what he'd seen of it. The people were gentle and full of humor, polite. The country was picturesque, a strange mixture of East and West, with the girls in Yokohama wearing bobby sox and skirts and lipstick, and the women in Fukuoko clinging to the ancient custom of the kimono.

Maybe he'd stay a while. Maybe he'd drift toward the interior, see some of the places the Navy never saw. Maybe he'd do that. It all depended on how it worked out. He'd be able to tell after a few weeks, he supposed. Unless he were caught.

He shoved the thought of the

Naval prison at Portsmouth out of his mind.

If you're going to be a deserter, he told himself, be a goddamn good deserter.

He considered some of the houses lining the road, and then rejected them. If a search party came, they'd be sure to hit every house along the way. No, none of them would do. He kept walking until he hit the first cutoff. He turned right on that and kept walking, parallel to the beach, with the stars showing above now, hard and brittle.

He passed three houses on the cutoff, kept walking past a fourth and fifth, and then realized the fifth house was probably the last on the cutoff. He turned back and walked to it, standing in the road and looking it over carefully before he stepped into the yard. A long open shed was at one end of the yard, and a goat was tethered near the house. A stream wandered near the shed, and a thick flat stone was near the stream. The place was nicely landscaped, as all Japanese homes were. He started up the path and stopped just outside the house. An old man was sitting there, slowly puffing on a pipe.

"*Kohn-bahn-wa*," Thompson said. "Good evening."

"*Kohn-bahn-wa*," the old man replied.

"*No-mee-mee-zoo-wa, a-ree-ma-ska?*" he asked. "Have you any drinking water?"

The old man lifted his head for the

first time. He was narrow-faced and narrow-lipped with a thin white beard trailing over his jaw. His face was a tangle of wrinkles, and his eyes peered from beneath the wrinkles and the layers of flesh like two hot coals.

"I speak *a-may-ree-ka-no*," the old man said abruptly.

"Oh," Thompson answered, surprised. "Good. May I have some water?"

"Yes. Moment," the old man said.

He rose, shaking the dottle from his pipe, sliding open the screen at the front of the house, and stepping out of his shoes. He returned in a few minutes with a pitcher and a small cup, and he took these to the well near the shed, dipped a bucketful and poured it into the pitcher. He came back to where Thompson was standing, poured the cup full, and handed it to him.

"Good water," the old man said. "Clean. No worry."

Thompson was not thirsty. He had needed an opening gambit. He drank warily now, in spite of the old man's assurance. He'd had dysentery in Sasebo, and once was enough, thanks. He drank a little, handed the cup back, and said, "Thank you."

The old man nodded, poured himself a cupful and drank heartily. He put down the pitcher and cup then, and asked, "You are from the ship?"

The question surprised Thompson

until he realized the ship was probably easily visible from here. And an American would be a rare occurrence here if he were not connected with the military.

"No," he said, perhaps a little too quickly and too strongly.

"No?" the old man looked at him shrewdly.

"The volcano," Thompson said, seizing on the first thing that came to his mind. "I come to make graphs."

"Oh?" the old man said. He continued to eye Thompson shrewdly. "They come always," he said at last. "But they are always many. You are alone?"

"Yes."

"Mmmm."

"I was wondering if you could put me up for the night. Or maybe a few nights. My work is almost done, and I thought . . ."

"Certainly," the old man said, bowing politely. It was always that way, Thompson thought. A carry-over from the occupation, undoubtedly. The immediate acceptance, the expressionless facade. The attitude of conquered to conqueror. When would the Japanese stop being the conquered? Or was it all in his mind?

"Come in," the old man said. "Come in."

He watched, and when Thompson automatically removed his shoes before entering, his eyes narrowed.

"You have been in Japan long?" he asked.

"A little while."

"Come in. Come in."

Thompson stepped into the cool, dim interior of the house, noticing immediately that the screens were up, and wondering if the rest of the family was asleep.

He heard the padding sound of bare feet approaching, and he looked up when the woman entered.

She was short and squat, her face a clean-scrubbed brown. She smiled when she saw him, bowing low, bobbing her head. The three gold teeth in the front of her mouth sparkled.

"My wife," the old man said.

"How do you do?" Thompson inquired politely.

"She does not understand *a-may-ree-ka-no* too well," the old man said. His wife nodded and continued to smile. He turned to her and rattled off something in Japanese, too fast for Thompson to follow. The woman nodded and left the room, bowing before she departed. Thompson waited, wondering, and then the woman returned. There was a young girl with her this time.

The girl wore the baggy slacks and loose blouse that Thompson had seen a thousand times before on Japanese women. Her hair was clipped short, tousled now, and there was a streak of dirt on her face, as if she'd just come in from the garden. She smiled, and her teeth were her own, white. She stepped forward and the old man said, "My daughter."

The girl extended a hand, seemed to remember it was caked with earth, and drew it back abruptly. She almost blushed, and Thompson liked the blush, and the quick way she lowered her eyes.

"Forgive me," she said in Japanese. "I was digging outside."

"That's all right," Thompson said, answering in Japanese.

"You speak our language," the girl's mother said in surprise.

"*Hae*," Thompson said. "Yes." And for the rest of his stay in their home, they spoke nothing but Japanese.

3.

He woke at 0800 the next morning. He woke to the sound of American voices. He leaped to his feet and put on his trousers quickly. He remembered abruptly that he was still wearing dog-tags, and he hoped no one had noticed them while he was asleep. He ripped them off and shoved the screen aside.

"Hello," he called softly.

An answer came from outside. He slid open the screen a bit and saw the girl bending near the stream, washing clothes on the flat, circular stone. He made a hissing sound with his mouth, and when she looked up, he motioned for her to come to him. She stood quickly, wiping her hands on her slacks and running to the house. He watched her fast movement, watched the way her small, firm breasts swayed as she ran. He

wondered if her legs were good. The Japanese women he had seen had all possessed fine legs.

She came into the house, and he slid the screen closed behind her. She smiled and said, "*O-haee-yoo*. Good morning."

"Listen," he said, "I heard American voices."

"Yes," she said. "Sailors. They are looking for a shipmate."

Already, he thought. Goddammit, why did I oversleep?

"Have they been here yet?"

"No. They stopped down the road. They fear he has injured himself."

"The sailor?"

"Yes."

"Is that what they said? Did you hear them say that?"

"Yes. He was climbing the mountain yesterday, and they fear he is lost or injured. They are asking if we saw him." She paused and raised her eyes to his. "Did you see him?"

"No," he said quickly. "Listen, where are your parents?"

"They have gone to the village."

"Look, I don't want to talk to these men. Do you understand? *Wa-ka-ree-ma-ska?*"

"I understand."

"I am doing work on the mountain, and I do not wish to be disturbed. I do not want to answer a lot of questions. *Wa-ka-ree-ma-ska?*"

"I understand. Yes."

"*Yo-ro-shee*. Good. When they come here, you are to say no one is here. You are to say you are alone."

"Yes."

"You are to say you did not see me. Is that clear?"

"Yes, it is very clear."

"And you will do that for me?"

She lifted her eyes again, and they were very brown, sharply slanted. He thought, *she has lovely eyes*, and then he repeated, "You will do that for me?"

"Yes, I will do it. I will send them away."

"Good. Good girl. Go now. Go outside and work, and when they come, you will say you saw no one. You will not mention me."

"Yes," she said, and he thought, *a nice dumb girl, that's fine. Beautiful, like a sculptured piece of ivory, but dumb, and that's good. That's damned fine.*

She went to the screen and slid it open, and he watched the way her slacks clung to her supple body. She stepped outside and then, with her hand still on the screen, she turned and said, "You are the sailor they seek, are you not?"

He opened his mouth to answer, but she turned and was gone, and he bit down on his lip instead. He watched her run back to the stream, watched her as she beat the clothes on the stone. He could hear the voices coming closer now, and then one of the men called, "Here's someone, sir."

He wondered if she would give him away. He figured an escape route quickly. Shove back the screens at the side of the house and

leave that way while they were still on the opposite side. Yes, he could make it. But maybe she'd play ball. Maybe she would.

He slid the screen shut, leaving it open just a crack, and he put his eye to the opening. He heard Mr. Andrews' voice before he saw him.

"*Sheet-soo-rayee*," he said, "Pardon me, miss."

The girl looked up inquisitively. Only he could see her hands shaking, and perhaps he imagined that.

"We are looking for a sailor," Mr. Andrews went on in broken Japanese. "Sailor. Sailing man. He is hurt, maybe, or sick, or lost, maybe." He indicated the mountain with an extended forefinger. "He climbed the mountain. Have you seen him?"

The girl hesitated, and Thompson held his breath. If she spilled, he'd run. It'd make things harder, but he sure as hell wasn't going back to the ship to face a court martial.

The girl stood up, drying her hands again. "No," she said. "No, I have seen no one. I have not seen a sailor."

Mr. Andrews touched his hand to the gold-braided peak of his cap. "Thank you, miss," he said. He turned to the men, and said, "Come on, men, we'd better get to the road."

They turned to go, and one of the men said, "You sure he's lost, sir? You sure he ain't jumped ship?"

"If he has," Mr. Andrews said, "it's going to be T.S. for him, I can tell you that much. It's not going to be terrific, not for him."

Thompson watched and grinned. She'd come through for him, by God! She'd come through. He saw the search party turn the bend in the road, and then the girl dropped her washing and rushed back to the house. She threw open the screen and started, "I did what you . . ."

He scooped her into his arms and hugged her, and then he lifted her from the floor and swung her around. "Honey," he said in English, "you're a doll. A living goddamn doll."

She did not understand. When he put her down on the floor again, she lifted her face to his and asked, "Did I do all right? Was I all right?"

"You were very good," he said in Japanese. "You performed well."

"And you are pleased?"

"I am very pleased."

She lowered her eyes and said, "I wanted very much to please you."

Her voice was low, and it surprised him. He put his hand under her chin and lifted her face, and she tried to avoid his eyes.

"No," she said. "Please do not."

"Hey," he said. "Hey, now. Hey. What . . ."

"Please," she said. "I am ashamed. I am really ashamed. Now please. Please."

"What are you ashamed of?"

"I . . . I do not even know you. I mean, we have never spoken or . . . this is very foolish, and I am extremely ashamed of myself. Please forgive me, I must get back to work."

"No." He dropped his hands to

her shoulders and held her firmly.
"Why did you want to please me?"
"I . . . I wanted to."

"Why?"

"You will think me foolish, American. You will think I am a foolish Japanese girl, a stupid dolt of a farm girl."

"No. Tell me."

She raised her head, and her eyes met his, and she did not turn away this time. There was no makeup on her face, nor were there any dirt streaks on it this time. It had been scrubbed clean, and he studied the sloping eyes, and the delicate nose, the full red lips, the small rounded chin.

"Tell me," he said.

"I wanted to please you because . . . because you are pretty, American. You are the prettiest man I have ever known."

"Men cannot be pretty," he said.

"You have fair hair," she said.
"It is as gold as the sun, and I have never known such hair."

"And this is why you wanted to please me?"

"Yes. And also because I did not want the sailors to find you."

"Why not?"

"Because then they would have taken you away from me."

He stared at her curiously, and he saw nothing but honesty in her eyes and her face. He tilted her chin again, and he dipped his head low and covered her mouth with his own. Her lips were soft, and they trembled a little when his mouth found

hers. She pulled her mouth away at last and buried her head in his shoulder, and he could feel her trembling in his arms, and he did not realize that he was trembling.

"No," she said to his shoulder.
"Please, no."

"What is your name?" he asked. He pressed his lips to her hair, and there was the clean smell of soap about her, and he inhaled it deeply.

"Nara-san," she answered.

"Nara," he repeated. "Nara."

"And you? What do they call you, American?"

"Hal," he said.

"Har?" she asked.

"No, Hal." And then he realized abruptly that she could not make the L sound. He smiled and said, "You can call me Tommy."

"Tommy." She lifted her head and nodded and said, "This is much better than Har. Har is a curious name."

"Very curious," he agreed.

She seemed to remember suddenly that she was still in his arms. She made a move to go, but he held her tightly and she came against him again and lifted her face, and this time she kissed him.

"You will think ill of me," she whispered.

"No. No I won't."

"You will. You will think I am a bad girl, and that I am immodest. I know you will think that."

"No, Nara. I will not think that. I am not thinking that now, and I will never think it."

He took her mouth again, and her arms tightened about his neck, and when she pulled away at last, she was breathless.

"My parents," she said. "They . . . they will return soon."

"How soon?"

"Soon. Tommy. Tommy, Tommy."

"Here," he said. "Here, Nara."

They sat on the straw pallet, and she raised her lips and kissed him gently at first, and then fiercely. She lifted her hand then and stroked the hard line of his jaw, and her fingers trailed over his lips delicately.

"You are very pretty, Tommy."

"You are beautiful," he said.

"No. I am only a farm girl."

"But beautiful. You are very beautiful."

"Tommy, don't . . ."

He kissed her again, and the blouse opened beneath his hands, and her flesh was cool and feverish at the same time. She trembled against him, and the coarse material of her slacks slid over the smoothness of her hips, the flatness of her stomach, the deeply etched blackness of her navel. *Her legs are good*, he thought. *Her legs are excellent*. She shuddered against him, and her nails raked across his naked back.

Outside, he heard the trill of a bird, rising shrilly to the sky, mounting higher and higher on the early morning air.

And later, he lighted a cigarette and she watched him smoke. She watched him quietly, as if simply

watching him were a great pleasure.

"I do not smoke," she said.

"No?"

"No. The American women smoke, do they not?"

"They do." He was thinking of the search party, and not of what had been. He was thinking, *this is a nice little package, but the search party was just the beginning, and there'll be others. Once they figure I've jumped ship. Once that happens. Still, she is a nice little package.*

"I can learn to smoke if you like."

"Sure," he said.

"You are displeased, Tommy?"

"No. I'm very happy, Nara. Very happy."

"Is there a woman at home? An American woman?"

"No, there is no one."

"Is it this business of the ship then?"

"Yes," he admitted.

"I'm glad." She came to him and kissed him and guided his hand to her flesh. Then she pulled away and dressed swiftly and silently. "I'm glad it was not me," she said. "I'm glad it is only the ship."

Only the ship, he thought. *Christ, only the ship.*

4.

They ate later in the day, when the old man and woman had returned from the village. They ate *sa-ka-na* and *go-hahn*, the fish and cooked rice that made up a good part of the Japanese diet. He ate hungrily,

and he debated telling the old man that he was a deserter. He decided against it at last, and he spent the rest of the day watching the destroyer through his binoculars. There was little activity. The motor launch had been swung into the water, but it was being used for shorebound liberty parties. He saw no sign of the Army brass, and that meant the ship would stay in the harbor for a while yet.

He wished the ship would leave, but he knew it wouldn't before the Army brass came aboard. He swung his binoculars over the harbor, past the dozens of Japanese fishing smacks that dotted the surface of the bay. The motor launch swung out from the ship, cutting a wide arc in the water, and then heading for the town.

He followed it with the binoculars. It pulled up alongside the dock, discharged a load of white-hatted men, and then pulled out, returning to the ship immediately for another load. He watched the launch until darkness claimed the harbor. It carried no Army men. He stuffed the binoculars back into the case then, checking the white adhesive tape he had placed over the USN stamped into the leather, and then walked back to the house.

When he saw the stranger standing in the yard, he was instantly on guard. In the darkness, he only saw the outline of the man, and he wondered at first if it were not someone from the ship. The man

spoke then, in fluent Japanese, and he drew closer and saw his face in the moonlight, and heaved a relieved sigh.

The stranger was talking to the old man, and when Thompson approached, they stopped talking, and the old man waved to him. Thompson looked around the yard for Nara, but she was nowhere in sight.

The old man took Thompson's arm and said, "This is the man who charts the mountain." He shook his head and said, "Forgive me, I do not know your name."

"Hal Thompson." He wondered whether he should have given his right name, but he shrugged his doubts aside.

"Mr. Thompson," the stranger said in Japanese, nodding his head politely.

"My friend from the village," the old man said. "Aru."

Thompson nodded his head in turn. "Aru." He could not see the man's face too clearly in the gathering darkness. He was happy when the old man suggested they go into the house. He did not admit to himself that he hoped to see Nara inside.

When they were seated, Nara brought them saki, and she smiled at Thompson, and he felt a peculiar warmth in his chest. The old man saw the smile, and he nodded abruptly, but said nothing. Nara smiled again, and when she served Thompson his wine, her hand brushed his tenderly. She left the room then.

They talked of the weather for a while, and Thompson kept waiting for Nara to come back into the room. He knew it was against Japanese custom, but he hoped for it anyway. When she did not return, he joined the conversation.

"You are an American, of course," Aru said. In the dim light of the unshaded bulb hanging over the low table, Thompson could see Aru's face clearly. It was thin and narrow, with shrewdly intelligent brown eyes and a flat nose. High cheek bones, sloping eyes, the inscrutable look of the Oriental.

"Yes," Thompson said warily. "I am an American."

"Then you know there is a ship of yours in the harbor?"

"Yes."

"A fine ship."

"Yes."

"What type of ship is it? It strongly resembles a battleship."

Thompson smiled. "No, it's only a destroyer."

"Really?" Aru shook his head in muted wonder. "So large?"

"It's one of the newer destroyers," Thompson said. "2250-ton job." He drained his cup and said, "Is there more wine?" He said it because he hoped the old man would call for Nara. Instead, the old man rose, went to a stand in the corner, and brought back the wine, pouring quickly for Thompson. Thompson did not show his disappointment.

"We are not used to many ships here," Aru said.

"During the occupation, there were many," the old man put in.

"Yes," Aru agreed. "Yes, but not now so much."

"No," the old man said. "Not now."

This is great, Thompson thought. Are we going to sit here and discuss harbor traffic all night? Why the hell don't you go home, Aru?

"Will they be staying long?" Aru asked.

"Who?"

"The ship, I mean. Will it remain here long?"

"I don't know," Thompson said slowly.

"You do not know when it departs?"

"No."

"How would he know?" the old man said, sipping at his saki. "He has nothing to do with the ship."

"Nothing whatever," Thompson said.

"I thought, perhaps, since you are an American . . ." He let the sentence trail off. He lifted his cup and sipped at his wine.

They were silent for a long time, and then Aru said, "I was on an American destroyer once."

"Really?" Thompson asked, completely disinterested.

"Yes. I went aboard as interpreter. They showed me around the ship. It was very interesting."

"Yes," Thompson said, completely bored now. Why didn't the old man shut up?

"There were a lot of guns, I re-

member," Aru went on. "And a radar compartment just below the bridge. They showed me the magazines, too. Some were on the main deck, back from the bridge. Is it the same on all destroyers?"

"I wouldn't know," Thompson said.

"No, of course not," Aru answered, sipping at his wine again. They drank in silence for a while longer, and then the old man said, "It is getting late."

"Forgive me," Aru said rising. He bowed to the old man, and then extended his hand to Thompson. "It was very nice meeting you, Mr. Thompson."

"The pleasure was mine."

Aru bowed and made his way to the screen, pushing it aside and stepping into his sandals outside.

"*Kohn-bahn-wa*," he said. And then he was gone in the shadows.

When he was gone, the old man said, "A nice person, Aru. But talkative. Very talkative."

"Yes," Thompson said, thinking, *You contributed your share, too, old man. You damn well did.*

5.

The old man stood outside looking at the stars, and then excused himself. He slid the screen back and went inside, and Thompson could hear him undressing for bed.

He waited until the sounds inside had stopped, and then he went to find his knapsack, digging inside it

until his hand felt the checked walnut stock of the .45. He took the automatic from the knapsack, shook out the clip, nodded, and slammed the clip home again. *I hope I never have to use this*, he thought.

He'd stolen the gun from the gun locker, the night he'd had fire watch in Honolulu. He'd wrapped it in his winter underwear and kept it at the bottom of his foot locker, waiting for the day he'd make his break. He did not know if he would ever use it, but he wanted to be prepared. Even now, its weight felt comforting in his hand. He flicked off the safety with his thumb, hefted the automatic. When he heard footsteps behind him, he whirled abruptly, the gun level.

"Who's there?" he whispered. He unconsciously used English, and then rapidly translated it to Japanese.

"It is I. Nara."

"Oh."

He flicked on the safety and buried the gun in the knapsack. When he stood up, she was standing very close to him. She raised herself on tiptoes and brushed her lips against his.

"Hello, my Tommy," she said.

"Hello, Nara."

He held her close, and the moonlight streamed through the closed screens, splashed onto the wooden floor in heavy rectangles.

"I thought he would never go," she said.

"Aru," Thompson said, nodding.

"Aru. I do not like him."

"Why? Because he talks too much?"

"No, not only his tongue. I do not like his eyes."

"Do you like my eyes?"

"Oh, Tommy, you are joking with me."

"No, I'm not joking. Do you like my eyes?"

"I like your eyes, and I like everything about you. But this is not what I meant about Aru. Oh . . .

a-may-ree-ka-no day, nahn-to eeee-ma-ska? How do say in American?"

She paused, thinking for a moment.

"Trust, Trust, Tommy. No trust," she said, in English.

Thompson shrugged. "Forget Aru," he said.

"All right. If you say so."

"I say so. Shall we go for a walk?"

"Yes, Tommy."

He took her hand, and she returned his clasp, firm and warm. They went out of the house and into the yard, and the goat nannied, and they both giggled.

"He is a wise goat," Nara said.

"Undoubtedly."

"No, really."

"Really. I know."

They walked out onto the road, and Thompson looked down toward the beach and the harbor, and he could see the lights of the destroyer, and he wondered when the ship would leave.

"Your parents are asleep?" he asked.

"Yes."

He nodded in the darkness, and

he squeezed her hand tighter. She moved closer to him, pressing her breast against his arm.

"Tell me about yourself," he said suddenly, wanting to take his mind away from the ship.

"There is nothing to tell. I am a farm girl."

"There's always something to tell."

"No, truly."

"Truly, there is. Tell me."

She shrugged and smiled, and the moonlight glanced off her high cheek bones, sent sparkling darts into her eyes.

"We live here," she said. She shrugged again. "I do not like it here because I am afraid the mountain will erupt."

"Where would you rather live?"

"Sasebo," she said simply.

"Why there?"

"We always lived there. That is where I would like to live always."

"Why'd you come here?"

She paused. "During the war — not with Korea — the *big* war. There were many Americans. My . . . my father . . . he wanted to come to a place where there would not . . . be so many."

"I guess there are many Japanese who felt that way."

She touched his arm quickly. "Oh, please do not misunderstand. We may have left anyway. My father. He would better have been a wandering man. He has feet that travel." She laughed melodiously. "It is he who should have been a sailor." She stopped laughing, and

then said, "Forgive me, Tommy. Forgive me. I did not mean . . ."

"Does it bother you?"

"No."

"You're lying, Nara."

"No, it does not bother me. If you left the ship, then I know there was a reason, and I know it is right."

"That's very kind of you. I'm still a deserter."

"Do not say that, Tommy."

"It's true."

"Even if it is true, do not say it."

"All right."

They walked toward the shed, walked toward the long dark shadows that spilled over the ground. He felt as if he should do something, felt as if he should make it easier somehow, make it better for her, make it more decent.

"Wait," he said, and she nodded and stood in the shadows while he went into the shed. There was straw on the floor, together with gardening implements, but the moonlight struck these, and he walked further into the shadows. A large black bulk loomed ahead of him, and he walked toward it, feeling with his hands, hoping it was a pile of straw. His hands touched a heavy canvas cover, and he swore and pulled the cover back, reaching for his lighter at the same instant. He thumbed the lighter into flame, saw the five wooden crates and wondered, *Now what the hell?*

There was Japanese lettering on the top crate, and he moved the lighter closer to it and studied the

cript. The lettering was familiar, but he could not place it in his memory. He looked at it and studied it again, trying to make out the smaller lettering beneath it. He held the lighter closer, illuminating the whole of the large script, trying to read it carefully.

It made no sense to him. He only knew that the boxes were an obstruction, and he was half-tempted to start moving them around. But then he remembered Nara waiting for him outside, and he realized he was making things more awkward, rather than helping them along. He blew out the flame of his lighter, pulled the canvas covering over the crates, and then walked out of the shed.

"Come," he said. "The shed is no good. *Yoro naee.*"

They left the yard, their hands clasped, heading for the darker area of trees across the road. Behind them, the goat nannied again.

"You see," Nara said lightly. "He is a very wise goat."

Thompson smiled. "A most wise goat."

6.

He heard the sound of the jeep early the next morning. He was at the stream, washing his face, and when the high treble reached him, he recognized it immediately. He ran for the house, slid open the screen, and glanced hastily around the yard for Nara. When he didn't

see her, he closed the screen rapidly, and called, "Nara!"

There was no answer.

The jeep's engine was closer now. In desperation, he shouted, "Nara!" and in English: "For Pete's sake, Nara!"

There was still no answer. He ran through the house and found his knapsack, digging into it hastily for the .45. He checked the clip unconsciously, slammed it home, and then released the safety. *This is it, he thought. Goddammit, this is it. I should have left sooner. I had to get tangled with a slant-eyed wench when I should have been making tracks. All right, this is it. This is it, and stop blaming the girl. Find yourself a position, and run first, and shoot only if you have to. All right, fine. Fine.*

He swung the knapsack onto his back and then ran to the front of the house. He heard the jeep turn the bend in the road as he slid open the screen just a crack. He put his eye to the opening, and the jeep came into view, pulling up alongside the house.

He saw the old man standing in the yard, and he lost all hope then. The driver of the jeep cut the engine and stepped out, and the other man with him followed suit. They were Marines, Thompson saw, with the bright white and black band of the MP on their arm, and the Military Police markings on the jeep, too. *Marines, he thought, that's just great. There's nothing a Marine likes better than to get his mitts on a swabie. This*

is just great. And the old man out there ready to blab all over the place. Oh, this is great. Where the hell is Nara?

The first Marine swaggered over to the old man. He did not bother using Japanese. He spoke English, the way a conqueror will, expecting the natives to understand or the hell with them.

"Hey, old man," he called. "Hey, you."

The old man looked up and walked down to the jeep, bowing politely.

"You live here?" the Marine asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Alone?"

"No, sir. With my wife and daughter. Is there anything wrong, sir?"

Thompson watched, his hand sweating on the stock of the gun.

"You see any Americans around here lately?"

"Yes, sir," the old man said.

Thompson thought, *Here it comes, get ready to make a break.*

"Yeah?" the Marine said, his interest picking up. "When? Where?"

"A great many of them two days ago. They came from the ship, to climb Sakura-Shima."

The Marine was disappointed. He pulled a grimace, and his partner said, "That was that party from the ship, George."

"I know," the first Marine said. "Anybody else?"

"Yes," the old man answered.

"Who?"

"Another group of men. With an

officer. They came here to inquire about a man they were missing."

"That's the man we want," the first Marine said.

"Man, he's going to have troubles," the second Marine put in happily.

"Did you see him?"

"Who?" the old man asked.

"This sailor. A big tall guy, about six-two. Got blond hair and . . . where the hell's that circular, Mike?"

The second Marine dug into the pocket of his blouse and pulled out a folded sheet of paper. "Here," he said.

The first Marine unfolded the paper, studied it, and said, "Six-two, blond hair, blue eyes. No other identifying marks. Believed to be wearing civilian clothing, may be armed. You follow that, old man?"

"I understand."

"Well, did you see him?"

"No."

"These damn gooks don't even know if they're alive," the second Marine said. "Expect them to see anything out of the ordinary?"

"You sure you didn't see anyone?" the first Marine asked.

"Yes, sir. I saw no one."

"Reckon we ought to take a look inside?" the second Marine asked.

"Agh, what good will that do?"

"I'm just asking, that's all."

"That swabie is probably in California by now. You think he's going to stand around picking his nose?"

Come on, let's get the hell out of here."

They walked back to the jeep and climbed in angrily. The first Marine started the engine, and then spat into the road. Thompson watched, greatly relieved, and he saw them back into the yard and then curve out onto the road again. He stood by the screen with the .45 in his hand until the jeep was out of sight and he could no longer hear the whine of the engine.

He put the .45 back into his knapsack, the knapsack against the wall, and then went out to talk to the old man.

"Why did you lie to them?" he asked.

The old man shrugged.

"I want to know why," Thompson insisted.

"I did not want trouble," the old man said. "I cannot afford trouble."

"Well, thanks a lot. Whyever you did it, thanks."

"Do not mention it," the old man said.

Thompson went to the well, got a dipperful of water, and drank eagerly. He dipped more, drained the dipper again, and then looked over toward the shed. He remembered the crates he'd seen the night before, and out of curiosity he walked to the shed again. The old man watched him and said nothing. Thompson stepped into the cool interior of the shed, walking to where he'd seen the crates. They were gone now. It disturbed him

that he hadn't been able to decipher the Japanese lettering, because he knew it was a symbol he'd seen before. It disturbed him more now that the crates were gone. He walked out of the shed and called the old man, and when the old man came to him, he said, "There were some crates in the shed last night. They're gone now. I wonder . . ."

"There was nothing in the shed," the old man said.

"I do not wish to contradict," he said as politely as possible, "but there were crates in the shed and . . ."

"There were no crates in the shed," the old man insisted.

Thompson looked at him curiously. *Now, there sure as hell had been crates in that shed, he thought. So what's the old man clamming up about? What's he trying to hide?*

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"I am certain," the old man replied.

"Very well. I shall be gone for a while, returning after sunset. Is Nara at home?"

"Nara has gone to the village."

"Will you tell her I'll be back after sunset?"

"I will."

"My thanks to you then."

He went inside and took the .45 from the knapsack again. *I'd better keep you with me, baby, he thought.* He put the gun in his waist band and under his shirt, and then he took the binocular case from the knapsack and went out onto the

road to watch the destroyer. He climbed a short tree that commanded the beach and the harbor, and he trained his binoculars on the ship and watched the coming and going of the motor launch again.

As soon as those Army boys show up, he thought, the ship will leave. They'll sail to Pearl and forget all about me, and the local MP's or SP's, if there are any, will get tired pretty damned soon, and I can get out of here. I should be able to get a Jap to take me to Tokyo, he thought, and once I'm there it'll be smooth sailing. Maybe I'll take Nara with me, but maybe not. It all depends on what kind of passage I can get, and this is no time to be worrying about a girl. Besides, the surest way to attract attention is with a Jap wench on your arm, especially if she's your wife.

Well, no one's mentioned marriage, he thought, so let's not bring that up. You've got enough damned worries already. You were lucky the old man lied to those Marines, and you're lucky Nara didn't give you away when Mr. Andrews came snooping around. You've been lucky all the way, even so far as running across Nara, so don't start complaining. Just keep your binoculars trained on that boat, and the second you see khaki in it, you're okay. Those Army Joes are important, and the ship will hightail it for Pearl on the double, and then you'll only have the MP's to worry about. It's going to be all right, so don't

start worrying, he told himself.

But I wonder what the hell the old man had in those crates. Maybe he's doing a little black marketing, or smuggling. He sure clammed up fast, though. He sure did. Maybe that's why he got rid of those Marines so damned fast. Maybe he didn't want them snooping around his place. Now that was a thought.

He watched the launch for a long time, and he began to get sleepy and a little hungry, but he continued watching. After a while, his eyes began to bother him, so he turned his binoculars onto the beach, in an attempt to break the monotony of watching water.

It was then that he saw the man and the bicycle.

The beach was a dull mass of lava that had spilled into the sea. The man sat on the farthestmost jut of the lava, his bicycle flat on the ground beside him. The man had binoculars, and the binoculars were pointed out over the harbor.

Well, Thompson thought, a compatriot. Another bird watcher. Come clasp hands, fellow bird watcher.

The man's back was to Thompson, and he could not see his face. He saw the man turn to follow something out on the water, and when he lifted his own glasses, he realized the man's binoculars were trained on the motor launch.

That's interesting, he thought. Now, that's very interesting.

He was tempted to keep his own glasses on the man with the bicycle,

but the launch was moving across the water rapidly, and it was empty save for the coxswain and one officer. He watched the launch cross the bay and then pull into the dock across the bay.

He saw the khaki then.

Three men in khaki. They stepped into the launch, and the sun glinted on the braided peaks of their hats for just an instant. The launch leaped away from the dock almost instantly, cutting out into the water, and traveling in a wide curving arc toward the destroyer.

Aboard the ship, Thompson saw the pacing deck officer, saw hurried activity on the decks.

This is it, he thought. Goodbye, boys. Here come the brass.

7.

There was activity on the beach, too, so he swung his binoculars, and saw the man swing aboard his bicycle, his own binoculars hanging around his neck. The man swung the bicycle around, and then pedaled it toward the road running parallel with the beach, moving fast. He lifted his head, and Thompson saw his face for the first time, and the face made him stare.

It was Aru.

And then the bicycle was past and there was nothing but Aru's back hunched over the bars, and the cloud of dust that billowed up behind him.

He climbed down from the tree

and put the binoculars back into their case. He wondered why Aru had been watching the ship, and he also wondered why Aru had scooted off on his bike the moment he'd seen the Army officers in the launch. Had Aru known the ship would leave once the officers were on it?

He started walking back toward the house, and he tried to remember what Aru had talked about the night he'd been there. The ship mostly, yes. The ship, and the radar shack, and the maga . . .

The magazines!

And suddenly Thompson remembered where he'd seen the lettering on those crates before. He'd seen it at an Army ammunition dump in Sasebo. The big script with the smaller script beneath it. And under that, in English:

DANGER!

High Explosives

He quickened his step automatically, feeling the .45 big and hard against his belly. He quickened his step, and then he wondered why, and he slowed down.

By Christ, you don't think Aru is going to blow up the ship, do you? he asked himself.

He didn't know. He simply didn't know. But there had been high explosives in that shed, and the old man had denied it. And now the explosives were gone, and he'd seen Aru watching the ship and taking off like a big bird when he saw those Army officers approaching. And the old man had moved from Sasebo

because he didn't like the American occupation, and if you were going to blow a destroyer, a good time would be when everyone was busy getting it out of the harbor. And there was no better way than a pile of explosives aimed at the magazine, and since there were always hundreds of fishing boats in the harbor . . .

No, he thought, that's impossible. This is all crazy. And even if it isn't, so what? What are you going to do, stick your neck out? You're away from the ship, and if the damned thing is blown up, there'll be no one to worry about desertion. The case'll die in the records of the Kagoshima Military Police, and that'll be that. Blowing up that ship will be the luckiest thing that could happen to you. You've had it lucky so far, but this tops it all. This is the master stroke. This sets you up fine, pal, and there'll be no one around to carry the tale.

He was almost happy. He quickened his step, and he walked back to the house with his head high. He found Nara and the old lady there, but the old man was gone. Nara took his arm quickly, and brought him outside. There was an anxious look on her face.

"My father," she said, when they were far enough away from the house.

"What about him?"

"He has gone to town. He will meet Aru there."

"How do you know?"

"I know. He told my mother.

He did not know I was home. I overheard him. Tommy, this is not good."

"Why?"

"On my father's boat. Explosives. Tommy, they will destroy the ship."

"Nonsense," he said.

"Tommy, they will. They will aim the boat and the explosives at the ship. Tommy, they will destroy it."

He looked down at her, and she saw his eyes, and he turned his head to avoid her penetrating gaze. A frown creased her forehead, and he thought she might even cry.

"You know all this, Tommy."

"No . . ."

"You know all this. You know of their plan. You know that my father is an old man with a harbored grudge against those who would invade his homeland. And you know that Aru fought against the Americans on Iwo Jima and . . ."

"No, Nara. I did not . . ."

"Tommy, you must stop them. You . . ."

"I'm a deserter," he said.

"Still . . ."

"Goddammit, I'm a deserter. Can't you understand that? You think I'll get a medal for stopping Aru? You think the Navy'll promote me or something? Nara, they'll send me to prison. They'll have me chopping rocks for the rest of my life."

"How many men are aboard the ship?" she asked.

"I don't know," Thompson lied.

"Two hundred, three hundred?"

"Something like that, yes. But . . ."

"Three hundred men who are not expecting a boat full of explosives. Three hundred men who will die for no good reason . . ."

"Dammit, you won't understand! What the hell do you want from me?"

"Stop them."

"What makes you think I *can* stop them?"

"I know you can, Tommy."

"Well, I can't. And I don't want to. They can blow up every ship in the Pacific Fleet if they want to. I'm not ready to start fighting a dead war all over again. I don't give a damn."

"Tommy, you do not mean that."

"I do mean it. I mean it."

She stared at him fixedly, as if sheer concentration could sway his resolve. Then at last, she shook her head a little and said, "Perhaps you do."

"Nara . . ."

He reached out for her, but she had already started down the road. He watched the way her legs moved swiftly, and it suddenly mattered a great deal what she thought, and he shouted, "Nara!"

He realized, too, that she'd try to stop that boat without him and he stood in the middle of the road for an instant, wondering, undecided.

"Nara! Nara!"

His legs were moving. They churned up the dust of the road,

and he was surprised to find himself running. He caught up with her and said, "This is insane, Nara. We'll never stop them."

"We can," she said. "Aru's boat has a motor, but there is another such in the village. We can stop them."

They were running together now, and he thought of the situation and he didn't like it, he didn't like it at all. He could stop running, yes, and he could let the girl go after her, father and Aru, yes, he could do that. He could do that, but then he'd have to face the look in her eyes again. Those eyes had once told him desertion meant nothing, but they hadn't said that a moment ago. No, he had to go with her.

They came onto the road near the beach, and they ran faster, and far off he could see the destroyer hoisting up anchor, and he knew it would not be long now. He looked off down the long, dusty road, and saw a motorboat leap out from the point of land, and he knew it was the old man and Aru before Nara shouted, "My father!"

"This other boat," he gasped. "Where?"

"A little farther. There is a shed near the water. The boat is kept there." She pointed. "See? The white shed there."

"The owner . . ."

"He is away. Hurry, Tommy. Hurry."

He could see smoke pouring from the forward stack of the destroyer

now, and as he watched the ship began moving forward.

At the same instant, the motorboat shifted course, and Thompson could make out a collision point by simply extending the separate bisecting courses of the ship and the boat. The motorboat was painted a bright yellow, and it gleamed on the churning green-black water like a speeding teardrop.

It wouldn't be long. They'd aimed the boat a little forward of the quarterdeck, and they were sure to catch a magazine there; and even if they didn't, those five crates of explosives in the boat would rip one hell of a hole in the ship's skin. They'd probably jump just before the boat hit, and then they'd swim like hell — but the boys on the ship wouldn't have time to jump. They wouldn't know what the hell hit them.

"Tommy!"

It came as a shocked protest from her mouth, and he turned his head from the water swiftly. He spotted the jeep instantly, and in the same instant, he saw the bold MP lettered on its hood.

"Christ!"

The jeep was still up the road, and the shed with the motorboat was beyond the jeep, and that made everything fine and dandy, and he was ready to say the hell with it, it's been a nice try, but the hell with it. And then he thought of every MP he'd ever met in towns all over the world. He thought of

them, and he said, "Nara, start running for the jeep. Keep running toward it until you're about five yards from it. Then turn and run the other way. Run as fast as you can, and look back at the jeep often, and keep running. Even if they shout, and even if they give chase, keep running. I want you to stop only if they fire. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Tommy. But you . . ."

"I'll get the boat. I'll try to stop them. Go on, Nara, run."

"Tommy . . ." She lifted her mouth to his and kissed him hastily, and then clung to him for a moment.

"Run," he said in Japanese. And then, in English, "Run like a rabbit."

She kissed him again and then pulled away and ran for the jeep. He ducked off the road, running to the water, and splashing along in it, running fast, and listening to Nara on the road above him.

"Hey!" He heard the American voice, and he knew the MP's in the jeep had spotted her. "Hey, what the hell's going on there?"

He kept running, and then the voice shouted, "Hey you! Hey you, there, hold up! Hold up, I say!"

He heard the whine of the jeep's engine, and then saw Nara run past with the jeep in close pursuit. He kept splashing along until he reached the shed, and then he ducked inside and saw the boat. Only it wasn't a motorboat, and his face broke into a wide grin when he saw it. It was a

speedboat, an old job, but a speedboat nonetheless, and he thanked American production and Japanese buying power, and he wondered how the hell anyone in this rat town could afford a speedboat, but he didn't wonder about it too long. Someone had bought a speedboat, and though it was a really old one and needed a paint job and some brass polish, it was a speedboat.

He climbed aboard, and got the motor going, and he looked back only once at Nara before he sent the boat jumping out into the bay.

The destroyer was proceeding slowly, the way most ships will when entering or leaving a harbor. Thompson could see the yellow motorboat cutting a white wake in the water, slicing toward the ship on a diagonal line. The harbor was cluttered with fishing boats, and with the mountain and all that land mass, the Sugar George would get a hundred distorted pips on the screen. Everyone on board would be concentrating on getting the damned ship out of the harbor, and no one would pay any attention to a small yellow motorboat. Besides, the boat was coming in behind the bridge, and if any lookouts did spot it, chances were they wouldn't even report it.

He held the wheel tightly, and he thanked God there was gasoline in the speedboat. He kept the nose high out of the water, and he raced across the bay and unconsciously figured a course that would cross that of the motorboat.

He unconsciously did it because it was the only way he could think of stopping the motorboat. He did it, and the boat came closer, and he could see the big gray mass of the destroyer now, could almost make out the figures on the bridge, and he thought, *This is crazy. This is crazy, Nara. I was clear and away, Nara. I was free, Nara, and out of it.*

He thought that, and at the same time he hoped someone on the ship would spot the motorboat, and turn one of the twenties or forties on it. That would save a lot of trouble, and he nursed the thought along, knowing all the while that no one would see the damn boat, and that he'd have to do what he planned on doing.

He wondered why he was doing it, and he thought of all the men on the destroyer, and of the five crates of explosives in the motorboat. And he thought of what Nara had said about returning to Sasebo to live, and for a moment he thought of going there with her, living with her, living in the town she loved. He thought, too, of how simple the desertion had been, of how he had fooled them, and somehow the desertion didn't matter any more.

He still tried to understand why the nose of his speedboat was pointed directly at the cockpit of the motorboat, but he couldn't find an answer. He tried to detach himself from the boat and the bay and the harbor,

tried to look down on it all like some scene in a Saturday serial, but it was no use.

His last thought was, *Jesus, the owner of this boat will be sore as hell.* And then he hit.

8.

From the shore, there was a moment when speedboat and motorboat seemed to hang together, seemed to be suspended in time and space, seemed to hover on the air.

And then the explosion came, a gigantic blast of orange and red and yellow, of wood and metal.

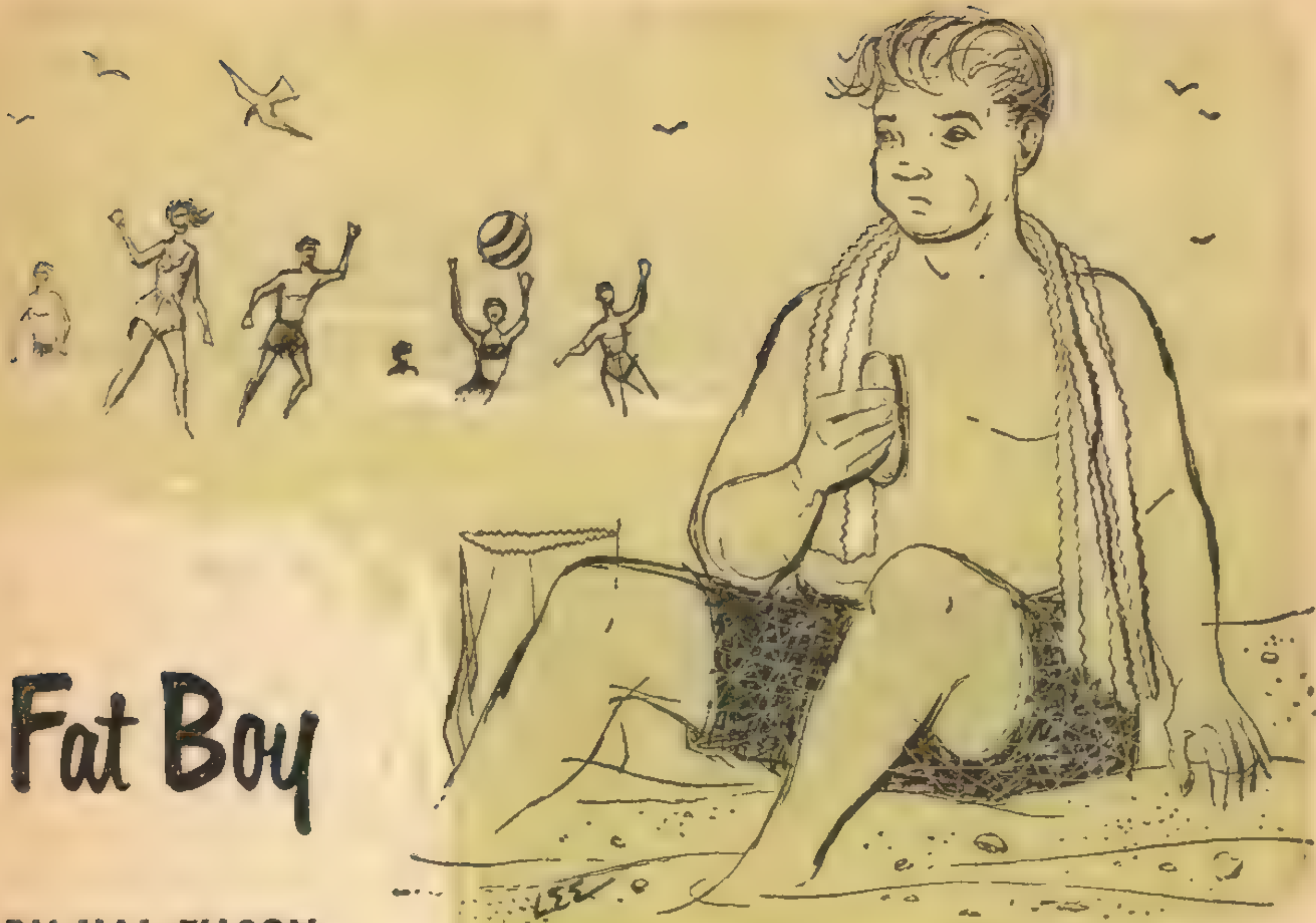
The MP looked out over the bay and said, "Them stupid Navy characters. Got nothing better to do than fire salutes. Goddamn it." He turned back to the girl and said, "Now, what was you running for, Miss. Just tell us what . . ." He paused and said, "Hey, look, there ain't no need to cry. I mean, hell, we was just checking."

The girl stared out over the harbor and saw the destroyer moving out past the jut of land, onto the open sea. She bit down on her lip and her eyes scanned the water where the two boats had been, and she saw nothing.

She lifted her head to the Marine and said, "I'm sorry. I am truly sorry."

And the Marine thought she was talking to him.





Fat Boy

BY HAL ELLSON

Everybody laughed at the fat boy. He didn't get mad, but he began to think of a plan to make them stop laughing . . .

HE TOLD himself he shouldn't have gone, but it was too late to go back; this was like a last desperate effort of a drowning man to reach safety. He shouldn't have accepted the invitation, but to stay home meant boredom, loneliness, the terrible wet, sticky heat which lay over the city.

Even now it affected him despite the fans whirling overhead in the subway car and the drafts coming through open windows. Every pore

seemed to be welling sweat and his clothes stuck to his body. But that was the least of it. The others were amused at his discomfort.

"Fat boy's going to melt away before we reach the beach," said one of his friends, and there was a burst of laughter.

Robert pretended indifference but the remark had stung, just as all other remarks regarding his obesity had stung him. It was why he had not wanted to go to the beach and

decided on impulse only at the very last moment, thinking that today might be different and that he would not be the target of his friends' cruel jibes.

Now he realized how wrong he'd been and suddenly he hated all of them. He'd never liked them, not a one, for they were all the same. But it was too late to go back. Having committed himself, he saw that he had to go through with it. And only by pretending indifference could he defend himself. Still, there was pain, no matter how he managed to disguise it under the mask of blandness.

As the train raced on, he continued to sweat and, all the while, he sucked on a sour ball. A whole jar of these was in his bag, not to mention four enormous sandwiches, a slice of cake, cookies and several fruits. At least twice what any of his friends was carrying. For his appetite was enormous, his taste for sweets unending. And this was his undoing, the obvious reason for the obesity which made him the target for so many taunts.

As he watched his friends enjoying themselves, Robert's eyes kept wandering to Ethel, an attractive girl of fourteen whom he had once liked and whom he still secretly admired but with reservations, for she had changed, he thought. Whereas once she had been extremely friendly and never inclined to mention his fatness, of late he noticed her interest in the other

boys, and she had remarked about his fatness on several occasions. Worse yet, when the others had laughed at him, she had joined in.

Even now as she laughed he heard her above all the others. Not that they had mentioned him. Theirs was a perfectly natural laughter, for they were enjoying their own jokes. Well aware of that, Robert still experienced a curious mixture of pain and rage, if only because he didn't share their laughter. As for Ethel, he singled her out for a reason unknown to himself, and against her most of his rage was turned.

In spite of this feeling, he would eagerly have accepted any show of friendliness on her part if she had offered it. He even waited with a hopeless hope, thinking she might change her seat and come to him to resume their old companionship.

No such thing happened and, through the rest of the long, tiresome ride, she remained with the others while his feeling for her diminished completely.

Once off the train, there was a considerable distance to be covered before they reached the beach. But this fazed no one except Robert. The others accepted the blazing sunlight and hot streets as if it were the cool of autumn. They joked, shouted, moved on in a joyous group while Robert lagged ever farther behind, for he could not keep pace with them. Occasionally someone in the group would urge him on with

some inappropriate remark which brought forth more laughter and further enraged him. He even thought of going back, but they were too close to the beach now and it would be foolish to turn back after coming so far.

At the beach the group immediately threw down blankets and took off their outer clothing. By the time Robert reached them, half were ready to go for a swim. Robert was the last to arrive and he made no effort to strip. Instead, he waited, expecting the others to rush into the water. Some did, but part of the crowd remained and, soon enough, what Robert had hoped to avoid came about. This because, unlike the others, he had not bothered to strip immediately, feeling too conscious of his body. But had he joined the others, their attention would not have been drawn to him. At least now that he was still dressed he was an isolated target and the others were made aware of his embarrassment.

A sudden shout made Robert jump nervously and his cheeks went red when the others began to rag him. Now they were all watching and laughing, and he hated them all. He was of a mind to flee, but they had formed a ring around him and escape was impossible. Besides, he felt exhausted from the walk. To go back was out of the question.

So he began to undress. He even smiled as the others cheered when he dropped his shirt on the sand—

a smile full of pain. At last, stripped of everything but his bathing suit, he stood before them. There were more jibes and cruel remarks, derisive laughter, but Robert pretended indifference. He even tried to shrug off their sallies. As for Ethel, that was different. Though she had said nothing to lend to his embarrassment, but only smiled, his hate went out to her. Somehow, some way he'd get back at her, he thought.

Then, suddenly, he was no longer the center of attraction. "Last one in is a bum," someone shouted, and there was a mad scramble for the ocean. Sand flew, white heels flashed in the sun. Then, like young seals, the group hit the surf.

Alone, Robert felt relieved, but this was only momentary, for there were others on the beach, strangers who looked at him curiously, as if he were a freak from one of the side-shows on the boardwalk. There was also his sensitive skin to think of. Already he could feel the sun on it and feared the pain which would follow the inevitable searing. It would be better to get into the cooling surf that came rising out of the blue sea. Shouts and laughter sounded from there. He saw the sleek, wet heads of his friends, brown arms splashing water. Their joy goaded him and, at last, he started forward at a slow trot, his loose flesh shaking like jello.

One thing he could do well was swim and he was prepared to show the others. It was his element and a

feeling of joy possessed him as he moved forward. Now he'd show them, nor would they notice how fat he was once he entered the water.

But one of them saw him coming and a shout greeted him as he reached the wet sand from which the waves had receded.

"Watch out, here comes Jumbo!"

This unthinking cry struck like a barb and Robert hesitated, almost went back as he heard the others laugh. Then he went on and plunged into a wave that rose out of the blue sea.

Holding his breath, he remained under till his lungs were bursting. When he at last arose, he was alone but he heard cries of astonishment. Never before had he swum under water so far. Anger had given him the strength. More than that, it had done something else which frightened him. For he had wanted to stay under, never to come up again. The feeling had taken hold violently and, in the end, it frightened him.

The shouts recognizing his feat gladdened him and that wish which had sent him under for so long, the desire to obliterate himself passed like a shadow from his mind.

"Yeah, try and beat that, anybody," he shouted back when he got his wind. But there were no challengers and his spirits lifted more. He continued to swim about, diving now and then to draw the attention of the others.

But soon the others had enough. First the girls went back on the beach, the boys following. At last Robert was alone and he hated to come in but he felt isolated now, his motions without purpose when there was no one to watch.

Some minutes after the others he went back to the beach. As he came out of the water he saw that the others had spread blankets and were lying on them. Some were eating their lunch.

Robert hurried to the place where he had dropped his own lunch and immediately opened the package. As he produced the first sandwich there were remarks and laughter but he no longer cared. In fact, their jibes now made him feel superior. Not one of them, he knew, could match his appetite. Not one had carried so much food along.

"Fat-boy, the greatest eater in the world," one of his friends remarked, and Robert smiled only to be stung in the next moment by another remark.

"Piggish," said Ethel. "No wonder he's so fat."

These words were not meant for his ears, but Robert heard and flushed, then went on eating. It almost seemed that her comment had only stimulated his desire for food. Still, her words remained in his mind; he marked them there.

Soon the others finished; some lolled in the sun. Those who didn't began to wrestle and perform their usual gymnastics as much to rid

themselves of a general exuberance as to impress the girls.

Of course Robert took no part in this, still busy eating. But even if he hadn't been, he would still have remained on the sidelines, as this wasn't for him. Even to attempt to participate would only draw attention to his body.

But it hurt to sit there and watch the others. For their bodies were firm and muscled, and he envied them their adeptness. One boy in particular stood out — Ray O'Neill. Though he was no older than the rest he appeared so, his golden brown body better muscled, stronger and yet more flexible. The natural leader of the group, he outdid everyone with an easy grace. Not only did the fellows admire him; the girls did, too, Ethel no less than the rest.

Robert noted how her eyes followed him every movement, how she clapped whenever he performed some special feat. Her eyes shone, reflecting an admiration that Ray was not unaware of.

It was this innocent play that further goaded Robert. And all the while that he watched those two he continued to eat, not with pleasure now; he was not even thinking of the food, yet he had to dispense with it, and that meant to finish it all. Which he did. Meanwhile he watched Ray and Ethel, then only Ethel, who remained unaware of his attention, with the same rapt look on her face as she followed Ray's graceful movements.

It was perfectly obvious that she had a crush on him. That went for all the girls, but Robert ignored this fact, concentrated as he was on Ethel. While he watched her, he began to take note of her feature by feature. Her lips he thought too thin, her nose too long, her chin too small. Only her bright copper hair withstood assault, for this was what his examination was. Picking her apart piecemeal, he sought to destroy the image of her, and he succeeded so long as he went about it in this manner. But when he looked at her in full, that was another matter. She was pretty and he did like her, but the very feeling that attracted him only caused him to deny this.

She's disgusting, he thought, and at last stood up.

Having had enough of them all, he decided to ramble about by himself, but now the boys had begun wrestling. Several pairs were having a go at each other while Ray stood aside, his arms folded across his chest. As Robert started away from the group someone shouted out a challenge that involved him and Ray. Robert stopped in his tracks, then the others took up the cry.

"I'm ready if he is," Ray declared, smiling at Robert who pleaded that he was too hot to wrestle.

But the others would not hear him and they were chanting now, drawing the attention of strangers who sat nearby.

"Fat-boy is yellow! Fat-boy is

yellow!" they repeated over and over, and Robert wanted to flee. At the same time his anger made him stand his ground, which was foolish, for he had no chance against Ray.

Both of them knew this, but they were now involved in something beyond themselves which they could not equate. The issue had to be met head-on. That was inevitable and, under the urging of the others, Ray dropped his arms and moved in.

Robert immediately raised his, and already he was sweating. Worse, he felt a terrible trembling which, try as he did, he could not control. They began circling now, pawing at each other, Ray smiling, Robert beginning to breathe heavily, a determined look on his face which evoked laughter from the watchers. Of a sudden, he found himself wanting to win. He had to, he thought, and he could if only he could grasp the quick-moving Ray.

But that wasn't possible. In, out and around Ray wove, playing with him, making him look so awkward, maddening him finally so that, summoning all his strength, he lunged at him only to feel Ray's back glide under his outstretched hands. In a twinkling he was gone. Then the awful thing happened — just how it came about he didn't know, for the next moment a resounding blow in the back stiffened him. Then his ankles were grasped and suddenly pulled back, unbalancing him so that he pitched forward heavily,

his face striking the hot sand of the beach. Before he could roll over Ray landed on his back, knocking the breath from him. Then, amidst the cheers of the onlookers, he was turned over and his shoulders pinned.

Humiliated and at the point of tears, Robert stood up and spat sand from his mouth. Sand was in his eyes too, and he couldn't see. No matter, though, he heard the others laughing; Ethel too. Then, half-blinded, he saw her and he would have smacked her face had she been alone. Instead, he strode off, muttering, "I'll fix you," which was accepted by all as the empty threat of a sorehead.

Once on the boardwalk, Robert put aside his thoughts and misery, for here was a world which scattered pain with rich and tempting things, colors, noise, music, the crowd itself exciting — a profusion of sweets and viands here for any one's asking — more than anywhere else on earth. A boy's paradise of ice cream, popcorn and frankfurters. Robert was drawn to the eating concessions like a fly and, as if he had not eaten at all, he gorged himself again. Frankfurters followed ice cream, root beer on top of hot corn, then sticky taffy, frozen custard. Wherever his eye fell he bought and ate without discrimination. Then, at last filled, he headed back to the beach.

Hotter now, the beach a glaring yellow dotted with the indolent forms of sunbathers. Robert squinted, his skin felt dry and

parched in spite of the fact that he was perspiring. A warning which he failed to heed, for he was more interested in the activities of the group he'd come to the beach with.

They lay about on the blankets now, indolent, absorbing the sun, listening to music from a portable radio. As Robert came up to them, there were lazy greetings, no taunts, but no one moved over to allow him a place on a blanket. The reason was fairly obvious, for boys and girls had paired off now. There was no extra girl for Robert.

Isolated, without a partner, and not part of the group, he pretended he didn't care and sat down by himself with his own thoughts.

Soon enough the others began to stir, the hot sun and their own unquenchable energy driving them back to the restless surf which was rougher now. As it came tumbling in, they met it and their cries rent the air.

Robert ambled after them and stood in the wet sand, listening to the water hiss as it raced around his ankles and receded. He was watching the others; more, he was aware of the turbulence which marked the surf. Something violent in it stirred him and made his skin prickle. Then a particularly large wave rose out of the deep and came rolling in. As it curved ominously and began to froth, he saw its dark indrawn belly and was stirred again. A remote yet definite feeling of fear touched him. Perhaps the others

felt the same thing, for there were sharper cries now, and girls squealed as they retreated before the oncoming comber.

Seconds later it tumbled, broke; white water boiled and sparkled in the sun. Bathers were struck down and carried back toward the beach. Out of reach of its strength, Robert stood his ground and felt the water, chilled now, wash around his legs and rapidly recede.

Then he moved forward. Ethel had fallen. Reaching her, he helped her up and she smiled at him. At that moment he recalled the dark belly of the wave and it seemed to be towering over him, the image so real in his mind that inwardly he flinched.

In the next moment, without knowing why, he said, "Let's swim out."

The challenge, for it was that, was immediately accepted and both of them plunged into the water as another wave raised itself from the sea. As they swam to meet it, it reared higher and higher and, at last, as it curved and started to topple, Robert saw its dark belly and fear struck at him, an overwhelming sensation took hold of him which he could not account for. Accompanying this was another feeling — a desire for the very oblivion promised in the dark shadow of the wave.

Then the wave broke and, as it washed over them, he grabbed for Ethel, taking her under with him,

refusing to let her go as she struggled, unable to let her go. They were tumbling now as the wave carried them forward, caught in a green, lighted underworld of water which was suddenly frightening. Over and over they rolled, limbs and bodies entangled, lungs bursting. Then Robert swallowed water, the grip he had on Ethel broken at last.

Finally, in a shallower place, he found his feet and arose spluttering and blinded. Then he caught the glare of the sun, saw a new wave rising and Ethel standing before him, red-faced and angry. In the next moment she struck him across the mouth and he grabbed for her with the intention of taking her under the new wave ready to break behind her. But she was too quick and got away from him. As he started after her, he noticed the others on the beach and all were laughing.

In a fury he plunged back into the surf and swam about for a long while. At last, when he turned to the beach, he saw his friends rolling up their blankets and getting into their clothes. The sky had darkened ominously, black clouds were racing overhead. The whole beach was stirring, retreating toward the boardwalk.

"Come on, fat-boy!" a voice cried out, and Robert waded in. As he reached his friends, they were ready

to move. No one thought of waiting for him. No one remarked about the incident in the water. Ethel, he noted, avoided his eyes. As they walked off, he hurried to get into his clothes, then followed the others.

Drops of rain were splattering the sidewalk when he reached it. His own crowd had reached a corner bus-stop and was climbing aboard a bus. Still half a block away, he began to run; then the rain came in a deluge, as if the whole sky was dropping at once. Soaking and out of breath, Robert reached the corner just as the bus began to move. He stopped and as it went past he saw his friends within; they were waving at him, laughing and jeering at his predicament. He saw Ethel's face, open and ugly in laughter, and he thought again: "I'll fix you." She didn't deserve to live, he knew.

Without direction he began to walk. Gradually he realized that he was not walking toward his home, but toward the street on which Ethel lived.

She wouldn't go inside right away, he knew. She'd stand in the sheltered doorway, talking and laughing, for a while. She would still be outside when he got there, and if she weren't he'd wait until she came out again. He didn't mind the rain.

Thinking of what he was going to do, he didn't notice that his hands had bunched up into fists, great fleshy weapons like clubs.



CRIME CAVALCADE

BY VINCENT H. GADDIS

Sanctified Schemes

The con man's schemes go back to Eve, as proven by her "tomb," which for many years drew devout pilgrims. In a cemetery near Jedda, Arabia, a little racket called the Tomb of Eve did a rushing business and enriched its woman owner with a large fortune. Year after year thousands of Mohammedans dropped a coin into a slot in exchange for advice — through a speaking tube to an underground room — straight from "Mother Eve" herself!

Another Biblical hoax fleeced a renowned French mathematician and Sorbonne professor of the 19th century, Michel Chasle. The gullible scholar actually paid \$30,000 for over 27,000 letters from Mary Magdalene, Lazarus and lesser characters, some addressed to Christ himself. Yet these "authentic" communications were scribbled on modern paper, in modern French!

Sweet and Low

Milwaukee, Wis.; police arrested an Army sergeant whom a local matron found draped around a trunk in her attic, fast asleep. Said the sergeant confusedly, "This ship has the smallest berth I ever slept in!"

Willing Wager

An Oklahoma City motorist reported to police one Sunday night that a local service station was being robbed. R. E. Albee, an off-duty officer, heard the broadcast and rushed to the spot unarmed. Finding the attendant with his hands raised high, Albee hurled a brick through the window and demanded the thief's surrender. But it wasn't a hold-up at all. "I was just trying to win a bet," the attendant explained. "This fellow here said I couldn't hold my hands up for 15 minutes."

Topsy-Turvy Trap

Hopkinsville, Ky., police, investigating a burglary report at a store owned by Larry White, were spared a chase when they found the man hanging by his foot from the top of a door. He had pried the upper part of a padlocked door loose, but when he clambered up it snapped shut on his ankle.

Absentee Demerits

In a survey among inmates of Folsom Prison, Calif., on how to improve conditions in the institution, a really brilliant suggestion was made. Weekend passes for pris-

oners, one inmate suggested — with “black marks and no more passes” for any who failed to return.

Lifted Luggage

Niles, Mich., police are hunting a thief who swiped a phonograph and wire recorder from the Presbyterian church just to get a free room at a local hotel. He slept there one night, using the “luggage” to avoid paying in advance, and did not return. It was several days before the hotel investigated, and the church members still hadn’t missed their property.

Tattle Tags

Tagless dogs in Westerley, R. I., are more conspicuous than ever now that the town clerk has ordered new style dog licenses. They are distinctively shaped like large fire hydrants.

Merchandising Method

Mexico City police learned from Druggist Daniel Altamirano a novel method of selling below wholesale cost at a profit. Altamarano bought his goods from a competitor’s clerks who stole them from their boss.

Sporting Chance

Miami police, investigating a burglary at the Edward A. Portz house, found the loot included jewelry worth \$400 and two tickets to a ball game.

They went to the game and nabbed the thief with a pal.

It's Not in the Book

Dubuque, Iowa, police arrested three peddlers after residents complained they had forced their way into homes and used “highly abusive” language in order to sell Bibles.

In East Haven, Conn., Salesman David F. Mulcahy, 50, of Yonkers, N. Y., forfeited his bond in police court for a traffic violation. The bond was seven Bibles, valued at \$150.

In Cincinnati, Heywood Dorsey swore out a warrant against Frederick Gray, 41, for stealing \$5 from his Bible. The bill had been concealed between the pages bearing the Ten Commandments.

Golden Girdle

Customs inspectors in Buenos Aires eyed with suspicion a female arrival on a trans-Atlantic airliner, who staggered out of the plane more than a little off-center. Search revealed that her uneven gait was caused by 72 pounds of gold bars hanging from her underwear, and valued at over \$40,000.

Insomnia Cure

Thirty-four years of uneasy slumber apparently prompted the recent action of Owen Miller, 50, of Earle, Ark., who walked into police headquarters in Little Rock and gave the startled desk sergeant \$17.50. The money, he said, was in payment of a fine for disturbing the peace back in 1921. He had been released to raise

the money, but never returned. Police were unable to find a record of the charge, but accepted the money.

Feminine Fury

Chicago cabbie, Frank Mayer, will never honk at a woman again. When Mrs. Jeanie Fasano, 40, started to walk in front of his cab as the traffic light changed, Mayer tooted to warn her. Mrs. Fasano glared, planted herself in front of the taxi and stayed there. Mayer tooted again, whereupon she ran to his window and started pounding him. When he tried to close the window, she broke it. Drawn by the crowd, Policeman George Goodin came to stop what he called "a one-woman riot" and was promptly lashed by Mrs. Fasano's fists, purse and tongue.

Easy Pick-Ups

Bundled up in a sheet to camouflage himself against the snow, an inmate of the men's reformatory in Lincoln, Neb., escaped by climbing a fence. But then he thumbed a ride — from a state safety patrolman.

In Springfield, Ill., George Washbond was held for driving under the influence when his car went off the street, down a long ramp, and into the basement of police headquarters.

A Sacramento, Calif., citizen ag-grievedly told police that when he sped across a rain-lashed street into what he took for a taxi, it proved to

be a police car and he got a ticket for jaywalking.

Police in Windham, Conn., reported that, while fleeing from the scene of an accident, Leo A. Racine drove through a bedroom wall, waking Ernest Angel, a state policeman.

Happy Huggers

Henry Welz, 82, of Harmon, Ill., informed police mournfully that two women burst into his home, announced they were throwing a party to which he was invited, and then hugged him. After they left, Welz found that \$500 pinned to his shirt pocket had left with them.

In St. Paul, Minn., grocer Julius C. Hensler was hunting a 200-pound woman of about 35 who rewarded him with a hug after he filled her order for a can of peaches. Shortly after she left, Hensler found his wallet and \$35 missing.

At Ott's Drive-In in San Francisco, Vivian Stewart, a waitress, reported in wrath that a tall, dark, romantic man had kissed her as she took his order. He left with her wallet, containing \$75.

A Policeman's Lot

In Fort Worth, Tex., D. B. Boone, radio repairman from El Paso, admitted stealing the radio from the car of deputy police chief Andre Fournier.

In Vancouver, B. C., visiting policeman Milo Clarence of Bremerton, Wash., got a rude shock when

thieves broke into his parked car on a downtown street and stole his policeman's uniform.

In Detroit, Mich., a young man who successfully passed the preliminary examination for suburban Dearborn's police force, stalked out indignantly. "I don't want to join any force that gives such screwy exams," he said.

Police Detective Austin Beierle of St. Joseph, Mo., reported sadly that when a car collided with his and the owner offered his car in payment of damages, he was gypped. He sold the jalopy for \$12.50 but his own damages were \$35.

In New York City, Mrs. Alice Berg, robbed of a \$2,700 payroll, screamed for help and an off-duty policeman ran after the thief. Unfortunately, a second off-duty cop heard her and took after the first, while the thief got away.

Show Stopper

Secret Service agents in Los Angeles stopped a performance of *Charley's Aunt* at the Carousel Theater, arrested two of the actors, and ripped up backstage flooring in a successful search for two bags of counterfeit bills. Agent Guy H. Spaman said that, acting on a tip that one of the leading actors, George W. Lewis, had stuffed the money under the stage, they arrested him and stopped the show during the intermission. Six persons, including a 17-year-old strip-tease dancer, were arrested for passing faked \$20 bills.

Clue of the Choppers

Atlanta police had one clue in a burglary recently—a set of false teeth found under a window. Their hunt was rewarded when Walter F. Cooper, 44, was apprehended and the teeth restored his gums to normal.



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A Novelette
BY W. R. BURNETT

Vanishing

The cabbie took Polling home. Polling paid him, walked in the front door — and disappeared.



Act

CALL IT what you please: blind accident, predestination, luck . . . but the thousand-to-one shot meeting of Lou Jacks, taxi driver, and Bob Stuart, out-of-work police reporter, in an all-night restaurant which neither had ever visited before, defied all the laws of probability.

Stuart, a tall, spare rather glum-looking young man, was returning from a date. It was two A.M. He had spent thirty dollars in various bistros and he was mentally kicking himself for being a show-off and a blowhard. True, the doll was a nice one and was used to the best squiring. But who was he kidding — out of work, as he was, in bad, and with only two hundred-odd dollars in the bank?

Lou Jacks had dropped a fare at one of the big, swank apartment houses of the district. He hadn't eaten since five P.M. and his stomach was rumbling. He arrived first. Stuart came a few minutes later. Their eyes met in the glass beyond the counter as Stuart passed behind the taxi driver on his way to the rear of the place.

"Fancy seeing you up here," said Lou, snickering rather sadly.

Stuart hesitated, then sat beside Lou. "Oh, I know some high-toned people. Few, but some."

"Want a ride in?"

"On the company?" asked Stuart.

"I did my spending for the night."

"You going to walk?"

Stuart pulled out a few crumpled bills and a handful of change, counted it over slowly, then put it away, nodded and remarked: "It's a nice summer night."

Again Lou snickered sadly.

Their orders came, and they ate in silence. Lou, who was ordinarily full of small talk about boxing, baseball and allied subjects, seemed lost in a surly, ruminative dream of some kind. But as Stuart rose to go, Lou put a calloused hand on his arm.

"Sit down, reporter. I need help . . . or I need something, maybe advice."

Stuart resumed his seat but said: "In case you got a story to give me, I've been fired again. My old pal, Nolly, the city editor . . ." He broke off. "The hell with all that, but I'm in bad at the 30th Precinct, particularly with the Lieutenant. I sassed him, it says here; I'm uncoöperative, I do this, I don't do that . . . you know how it is. And Nick, the Lieutenant, is a very big man, politically and horizontally. Don't waste your time on me."

Lou regarded him for a moment in silence. "Ain't this part of the 30th District, Bob?"

"Strangely enough, it is. Why?"

Lou hesitated, then asked: "Do you know Dan Polling?"

"Not personally. I know a good deal about him. Gunther and Polling. Hey! Gunther was buried yesterday, wasn't he?"

"Yeah," said Lou, "but that's got nothing to do with what I'm thinking about. Bob, ain't those guys kind of mob lawyers?"

"I wouldn't call 'em that. They take criminal cases. Why not? They're solid with the Bar as far as I know. Last time I saw Gunther it was in a courtroom. He collapsed after pulling one of the wickedest cross-examinations I ever heard — heart, high blood-pressure. Now he kicked off for good. What about Polling?"

Lou seemed to change his mind. Shrugging slightly, he rose, paid his check, and sauntered out of the place, followed by Stuart. "It's nothing, I guess," said Lou, as they stood outside on the deserted street. "I was born in a tough neighborhood where you keep your nose clean or else. I guess I'll keep it clean."

"Suit yourself," said Stuart, yawning; then he turned and started away. Lou stood watching him go.

2.

Stuart turned into the boulevard and walked toward the big, distant, towering buildings of the downtown area. "Good God, they seem a long way off," he thought — and *he* lived beyond them. So it might cost him two more bucks! He'd already spent thirty. Just as he began to look about for a taxi, one turned the corner abruptly and stopped almost in front of him at an intersection.

It was Lou. "Get in, Bob," he

said. "I got to get this off my chest. Come on. It's on the house."

Stuart climbed in, and Lou started off slowly down a dark side-street. "It's like this," he began. "I picked this guy Dan Polling up on a street-corner downtown. He was drunk as a skunk. He told me to take him to the Union Station, he had to meet a train. I took him there. I was just letting him out of the cab when he climbs back in, like he's seen something that give him a start, and says to drive away, to hell with meeting the train. So I drove him through the park for a while. He gets drunker all the time, so pretty soon he says to take him home. I took him home. He couldn't even get out of the cab. I practically had to carry him in and he's as big as you are, and then I had to take him up in the elevator — no operator after twelve. He gives me his key and I unlock the door. He's already paid me. I open the door. There's a dim light inside. And I can see a great big monkey with his hat on standing in the next room — a real rough-looking boy. Polling goes in, seeing nothing. Then the door shuts with a slam — and that's the last I see. The thing is, somebody was standing behind that door and, as soon as Polling went in, this guy slammed it. I was took by surprise, see? Anyway, I had my money and I'd delivered my fare — he was on his own. But, Bob, I just don't like it. It don't smell right. Okay. Tell me to mind my own business."

If it had been anybody else but

Lou Jacks, Stuart would have laughed at him, cursed him, maybe, for wasting his time. But Lou was the original Silent Joe on subjects that mattered. Stuart, in his work as police reporter, had often tried to pump Lou, who had grown up with some of the toughest boys in town, and besides, was single and played the tough joints on his nights off: he saw and heard plenty. But Stuart had never been able to get a peep out of him.

"Well," said Stuart, "this is nothing to call the police in about — yet. May be just a private matter."

"Yeah, and that poor drunk may be dead by now. It's just a feeling I got, Bob. I didn't like the looks of that big monkey I got a glimpse of."

"You want to report this at the 30th Precinct? I know *I* don't," said Stuart. "In the first place, the Lieutenant would think I was trying to pull a fast one on him — or a rib. He knows I'd just love to make him look like a hoosier, after the bad bill he sold Nolly about me — some of it true, however. Lou, if you want my opinion, they'd laugh you out of the Station. Tell you what. Let's you and me go back. Here's the gag. He meant to give you a five and he gave you a twenty; you are an honest Joe. You're returning the money."

"I'll go back," said Lou, "just so I can sleep. But who's going to furnish the money? Suppose everything's okay? So I'm out twenty bucks."

"All right," said Stuart. "Let's

take it this way. He gave you a one instead of a five, and you've come back to collect."

"That's more like it," said Lou. He was silent for a moment, then he said: "Of course we may both get our heads knocked off."

"I doubt it," said Stuart. "I got a gun. Don't look at me like that. I got a permit."

3.

To their surprise a slender, well-dressed blonde woman opened the door at the sound of the buzzer and, looking them over with mild interest, said: "Yes?"

She had a coat and hat on and they could see a couple of traveling bags just beyond. Stuart and Lou exchanged a quick glance.

"What is it, driver?" the woman inquired. "Didn't I pay you enough?"

Lou looked blank. "I didn't drive you, ma'am."

"Well, what is it, then?" the woman demanded, showing some concern now.

"I brought a man here — Mr. Polling," said Lou. "He meant to give me a five and only gave me a one."

"I don't understand how that could be," said the woman. "He's not here."

"Are you Mrs. Polling?" asked Stuart.

"Yes, of course. Who did you think I was? And by the way, who are you?"

"I'm a friend of Lou's — the driver, here."

The woman looked from one to the other, then she took a five-dollar bill from her purse and handed it to Lou, who took it with a rather embarrassed air. "Was Dan . . . was my husband . . . had he been drinking?"

"I'm afraid he had, ma'am."

"Well, then . . . God knows where he is. He may be upstairs with friends — knows a lot of people in the building. I'll look for him. If you brought him home he must be around someplace."

"Have you looked through the apartment?" asked Stuart.

"Yes," said Mrs. Polling. "I thought he was going to meet me at the Station. But the fact that he didn't means nothing — not with Dan."

"Have you looked in the closets?" asked Stuart.

Mrs. Polling recoiled. "Why should I?" Now her face showed deep concern. "I think I'd better call the police. What are you men up to?"

Stuart hesitated, then got out his obsolete press card.

"Oh," said Mrs. Polling. "Newspapermen."

"As a matter of fact there's a story I wanted to discuss with Mr. Polling, so Lou and I rigged up this little gag."

With a deep flush of embarrassment, Lou handed Mrs. Polling back her five dollar bill.

"See him at the office tomorrow,"

she said. "He's not hard to get to. But, Mr. Stuart, what did you mean about the closets?"

"Excuse me for saying so, Mrs. Polling," said Stuart. "But according to Lou here your husband was very very drunk indeed, falling down, in fact. So where could he get to?"

They looked in all the closets and searched the place from top to bottom. Mrs. Polling assured both men that there was not even a knick-knack out of place.

They apologized at length and left.

Driving back, Lou said: "I still don't like the smell of this. Do you, Bob?"

"No," said Stuart. "But that woman's either the greatest actress in the world — or she knows nothing about whatever it is."

"You sure threw me a curve with that five," Lou grunted. "Embarrassed hell out of me!"

4.

Stuart couldn't sleep; he'd drunk too many cocktails and worries about the future kept repetitiously running through his mind. Besides, from time to time he'd remember Lou Jacks' story about the drunken Polling and speculate about it fruitlessly. He turned and tossed, switched his light on and off, smoked one cigarette after another. Finally he rose and paced the floor. The more he thought about the Polling busi-

ness the more it intrigued him — and then a big story — if there was one — might be a real help at this uncomfortable juncture of his life. He was getting a bad reputation for insubordination and outspokenness. Things got around. Times were tight, jobs far from plentiful.

Just as it was beginning to get light there was a quick tap at his door, which startled him considerably, as he had heard no footsteps or creaking in the hallway. He hesitated, and then, not quite knowing why he did it, he noiselessly slipped his small automatic out of the night table drawer and tiptoed to the door.

He could hear breathing. The tap was repeated.

"Yeah? Who is it?" asked Stuart.

"Telegram."

"Slip it under the door," said Stuart, who was not expecting any telegrams or even a letter from anybody on this earth.

"Can't do that, mister."

The voice did not sound like the voice of one who delivered telegrams. Stuart, holding the automatic loosely in his right hand, put his ear to the door and listened intently.

"I said I can't do that, mister," the voice insisted.

"Why can't you?"

There was a pause. "It's collect."

"How much?"

Another hesitation. "Two thirty-five."

"Where's it from?"

"Look, mister — I haven't got all night to argue."

"Slip it under the door and I'll slip you the two thirty-five."

There was a brief pause. With his ear to the door, Stuart heard muffled curses, and his stomach muscles tightened. This was a phony, all right. But what was the big idea? The boy on the other side of the door had a voice as chilling as ice down your back.

"Look, mister . . ." came the voice. Pause. "Stuart, I got to see you for a minute."

But now a strange thing happened. The gun in Stuart's hand seemed to fire of itself, and Stuart jumped sideways, badly startled, at the ear-splitting crash.

Completely unstrung and shaking, Stuart heard heavy running in the hall, a distant slam, then silence. He kept muttering: "How did I happen to take the catch off? Was I that nervous? I better give up guns. How did I . . . ?"

He sat down heavily on the edge of the bed and stared at the windows which had a tinge of blue now as morning came on. Well, at least he was safe as long as he stayed in his room with the door locked. He was on the third floor; one window opened on a court, from the other there was a sheer drop to the pavement of the side-street and no house nearer than fifty feet.

But why? What? Stuart sat shaking his head. Finally he examined the gun to see that it was on safety, put it carefully away in the night table drawer, lay back on the bed

and with his arms under his head stared up at the ceiling where the faint light of dawn was beginning to show.

Exhausted, he fell asleep almost at once.

5.

At a little before eight there was a heavy knocking at his door. He woke immediately, sat up and shouted: "Get away from that door."

"Police! Open up!"

"Don't try to kid me," Stuart said, hastily opening the drawer of the night table.

There was a brief silence, then a familiar voice chimed in: "Bob, it's me — Coogan."

With a heavy sigh of relief, Stuart jumped out of bed and opened the door. Coogan and an unfamiliar city detective were standing in the hallway.

"Well," said Stuart, "what's the beef — double parking?" Then suddenly he remembered that Coogan worked out of Homicide at the 30th Precinct, but he grinned, stifling this thought. "Selling tickets?"

"Lieutenant wants to talk to you, Bob," said Coogan, eyeing Stuart rather oddly — or at least Stuart thought so.

"Oh," said Stuart. "So he finally wants to apologize."

"I wouldn't know," said Coogan. "Say, Bob, have you got a gun?"

"Sure. Permit gun."

"Where is it?"

Stuart indicated the night table,

but when the unfamiliar detective — Smith — started to open the drawer, Stuart stopped him. "Wait a minute. What is this?"

Smith turned to Coogan, who said: "Bob, I'm your friend. You know that. I'm giving you a little advice. Coöperate this time. It might help."

Stuart studied Coogan's big tough face. "Might help who?"

"All of us."

Stuart was baffled. He stepped away from the night-table and let Detective Smith take the gun.

"Now get dressed," said Coogan.

6.

Lieutenant Nick Parshal seemed neither more nor less friendly than usual. He had a big, square, swarthy face and the shoulders of a wrestler. He regarded Stuart in silence for a moment, while Coogan, leaning against the office wall, looked on in assumed boredom.

"Just a couple of questions, Bob," said the Lieutenant.

"I thought maybe you got me down here to say you were sorry."

"I think for a long time before I take steps," said Nick, slowly. "So I'm seldom sorry."

"I'm the impulsive type, I guess," said Stuart.

"That was my thought," said Nick, glancing momentarily at Coogan. There was a brief silence; then Nick asked: "Where did you go last night?"

"Want to get the steno in, so we can have a record of this conversation? It's two to one now."

Nick flushed slightly and nodded. Coogan went for the steno, who came in pushing his machine ahead of him.

Stuart detailed his movements at unnecessary length, mentioning all the bistros he had frequented, and all the cocktails he had consumed — naming them and even explaining the ingredients of an unfamiliar one. Nick was not amused. He sat in glum, red-faced silence, listening.

"And the young lady's name?" he broke in abruptly.

"Not with the help of thumb screws," said Stuart.

"It's your neck," said Nick.

"It's my what?" asked Stuart, looking around.

"Go ahead. Go ahead," barked Nick.

"Well," said Stuart, "by now it's two A.M. and I'm hungry. So I walk from the doll's apartment — pardon me, the young lady's apartment — and I find a diner in a side street." Now Stuart hesitated briefly. Should he bring the Polling business up? It was a fantastic, you might even say, silly story and would lead to endless questions. And then if he started telling everything, how about the guy with the telegram . . . good God! the whole business was like a nightmare . . . and what was happening, anyway? Stuart began to lose a good deal of his confidence. His neck, was it? What kind of a

remark was that. He resumed, sweating now: "So I find this diner. I had a club sandwich and a cup of coffee. I was there maybe fifteen minutes. Then I walked home. That's it."

"When we get to the sworn testimony, you'll have to do better than this, kiddo," said Nick.

"Maybe you can help me out," said Stuart.

Coogan moved in. He looked worried. "Bob, don't hold out. Advice from a pal."

Stuart looked from Coogan to Nick, then lowered his eyes, but said nothing.

"This gun the boys picked up," said Nick, "has it been fired lately?"

"No," said Stuart, smiling slightly. "I keep it for laughs." Suddenly an odd expression crossed his face and he stared again from Coogan to Nick. "Yes! What am I talking about? It went off by accident last night. I was just holding it in my hand and. . . ." His voice trailed off. What a feeble, lying statement that sounded like!

Coogan turned away and stood looking out the window.

"Where did this happen?" asked Nick.

"In my room."

"How?"

"I . . . well, I was putting the gun in the night table."

"So you had it with you last night."

"Yeah. I always carry it. I guess I've got a gangster complex or something."

"I guess you have," said Nick. "Where did the bullet go?"

"Go? How the hell do I know?"

"Well, did it make a hole in the wall? The ceiling? The chest of drawers? Where?"

Stuart thought this over, trying to remember how he'd been standing, how he'd held the gun. Vaguely he recalled that an open window had been facing him across the room.

"It might have gone out the window," he said, even his voice sounding dubious.

"Sure, sure," said Nick. Then he turned to Coogan. "Check it."

Coogan nodded and went out to make a call.

Nick was silent till Coogan returned.

"Bob," said Nick, lighting a cigar and puffing on it slowly, "let's go back. You had a bite to eat, then you walked home. Right?" Stuart nodded. "When did you meet Lou Jacks?"

Stuart started slightly. "You tell me."

Coogan groaned. "Bob, listen. This is no game."

"And I don't like it much," Stuart said. "Let's get the cards on the table. What do you want from me?"

"The truth," said Nick. "That's all."

There was a long silence. Finally Stuart said: "I assume, since Coogan's on the case, that somebody got the big bite put on. Right?"

"You can assume it."

"Look, Nick," said Stuart, "do me a favor. Question Lou Jacks first. He got me into this hassle — he knows a lot of wrong boys — and I don't want to get him in trouble. After he talks, I'll talk."

Coogan and Nick looked at each other for a long time, then Nick said: "It's a good idea, Bob. I like it. There's only one trouble. Lou's dead."

Stuart jumped slightly in his seat, and a horrible feeling of apprehension began to nag at his solar plexus.

"When? How?" he cried.

"We'll take that up later," said Nick. "Now, Bob — do you want to talk?"

"Yes," Stuart said, "and fast."

7.

Stuart told the whole story from beginning to end, leaving out not a single detail. But even to himself the story sounded like the worst and most preposterous kind of fabrication. He noticed during the recital that Coogan was sweating so heavily that he kept his handkerchief in his hand to wipe his face with. Nick's eyes got stonier and stonier. Finally Stuart finished.

"Bob," said Nick, after a pause, "if you don't mind me saying so, that is without a doubt the craziest goddamned story I ever had told to me."

"It's the God's truth," said Stuart.

"We'll check, we'll check," said Nick, wearily.

"We blundered into something," Stuart insisted. "I don't know what."

"You blundered into something all right," said Nick.

"Be sensible," cried Stuart. "Why would I kill Lou? What's the motive?"

"You're out of work," said Nick. "You pack a gun. Robbery."

"Was he robbed?"

"Yes," said Nick. "He was robbed. His pockets turned out. All his papers gone, his wallet, everything."

There was a long pause. "Well," said Stuart, "I hope I wake up shortly."

Nick got up and put on his hat. "Hold him," he called to Coogan as he started out.

"Detention room, okay? I don't want to throw him in the can, Nick."

"Just so he don't get away."

When Nick had gone, Coogan said: "Boy, boy — what a night you must have had! Are you crazy? Telling the Lieutenant about all the cocktails you drank! Let him build his own case."

"Coogan — Pat," said Stuart, patiently. "There's no case. I told you the God's truth."

The steno went out shaking his head. "After all those drinks, boy, how can you be sure?" Coogan asked sadly.

8.

At four o'clock that afternoon, Coogan came into the detention

room, still mopping his brow. Rita, a young police woman Bob had known for some time, was sitting talking with him. Stuart did not know that Nick had assigned her to the case and that she was trying to pump him. Nick was well aware of Stuart's susceptibility in regard to good-looking girls. Rita was a cute brunette doll with a baby face and the cunning of a fox.

Coogan chased her away and sat down beside Stuart.

"Buddy boy," he said, "you've got to get yourself a lawyer and a new story."

"What's up?"

"Look, I'm your friend, Bob. I got a weak, sneaking hunch you got caught in a switch of some kind — I don't know what kind, mind you. Well, there's no trace of a bullet in your room. But this is worse. We checked the Pollings. They never heard of you or Lou."

"You mean he's home?"

"Sure, he's home. I talked to him myself."

"Did you talk to his wife?"

"Yes."

"How did she seem?"

"What do you mean?"

"First, let me describe her." He did so, and Coogan began to look at him with interest. Then Stuart described the whole apartment, even to some pictures he remembered having seen on the wall — excellent prints of modern masterpieces.

"That's the woman — and that's the apartment," said Coogan, his

eyes showing hope instead of anguish for a change.

"Now about the woman. Did she seem calm — as if nothing was the matter?"

"No," said Coogan. "She seemed damned nervous and jittery to me."

"Look," said Stuart. "Let me give you a tip. Keep the Pollings under surveillance if it takes twenty men. Something big is going to break here. I can smell it. Do me a favor? Get Nolly Walters down here for me to talk to."

"The editor? Hell, he won't come."

"Tell him I'm going to drag his name into the case if he doesn't."

Coogan laughed hard, for the first time that day. "Okay, son. What a guy you are. Always in trouble."

9.

Stuart's ex-boss, Nolly Walters, was frothing at the mouth when he arrived, but Stuart soon had him calmed down. He explained at length about his hunch that something big was going to break — "we blundered right into it," he insisted — and that the *World* might just possibly have it exclusive if . . .

"If what?" snapped Walters.

"If you can get me out of here and put me back on the paper."

Nolly received this bizarre proposition with surprising calm. "I might get you out — depends on Parshal. But as for putting you back on the paper — I've got our respectability

to think about, you jailbird. This is the *World*, you know, not a yellow sheet. How about under cover?"

"Just so the checks don't bounce."

"What checks? I'll pay you in cash out of a fund I carry."

Stuart looked at his ex-boss in silence, then: "You don't think I'm guilty, do you?"

Nolly made a sweeping gesture of disgust. "Of course not. You haven't got nerve enough to kill anybody."

"Thanks, Nolly," said Stuart. "You're a real understanding friend."

After Nolly had gone, Coogan came back in. Stuart grabbed him. "Pat — about that bullet. The window was open. I remember. It opens on a court. If the bullet went out the window it hit a wall, or broke a window across the court. Has to be. If it hit the wall, you'll find it at the bottom of the court. And if it broke a window . . ."

"We'll take another look, and I hope we find it. Jacks was killed with a thirty-eight — like yours."

"Great," said Stuart.

Coogan left. Pretty soon Rita came back with a couple of cokes.

"You find me irresistible, I see," said Stuart.

"Always did, honey," said Rita, handing him the coke, and taking a seat.

While Stuart was eating his supper alone in the detention room, Coogan came in with a letter in his hand.

"One of the boys picked it up at your apartment."

The envelope was filthy and creased as if carried around in a pocket for a long time before it was used; it was addressed in pencil and badly smudged. Stuart tore it open impatiently.

He gave a wild start. It was from Lou Jacks, apparently. It read:

Dear Bob:

I had a flash on Polling.

Barek — Transco. Now you are on your own. I'm out, boy, and how! This ain't minor league. Goodbye.

Hackie

Stuart handed it quickly to Coogan. "It's from Lou. He must have mailed it just before he got knocked off."

"How do you know it's from Lou?"

"I assume it is. Get a handwriting expert. Dig up a sample of Lou's writing."

"Good," said Coogan. "But what does it mean?"

"I don't know."

"What's this word here? Looks like 'Transco.'"

"That's what it looks like."

Coogan grabbed up a phone. "Lieutenant there yet? Good. Tell him I'll be right in." Now Coogan turned to Stuart, beaming. "I knew you were in some kind of switch. A hunch. If I'd been wrong I might have lost my job."

"You're a sweet guy, Pat. I'll lose to you every night at gin rummy once this thing's over."

10.

Stuart slept fitfully on a cot in the detention room, with one dim, unshaded bulb burning over his head. From time to time he'd wake with a start and look at his watch. There seemed to be no end to the night.

At a little before five, the door opened and Coogan came hurrying in. Stuart sat up at once and reached for a cigarette.

"I'll give it to you fast," said Coogan. "The note was in Lou Jacks' handwriting but nobody can make any sense out of it, it's so badly written. Carson, handwriting, says he's not sure it says 'Barek' or 'Transco'. . . ."

"That's a big help."

The interruption irritated Coogan, who wagged his big head impatiently. "Now hold on to your hat. The Pollings have disappeared."

Stuart jumped to his feet as if he'd suddenly been given a touch of the shock treatment. "What! Why, you dumb Irishman! Didn't I tell you . . ."

"I'm not in command," Coogan said. "I can only suggest. We were late with the stake-out. They blew. We checked with the manager. It was a slick job. Polling must have had a car parked in the alley back of the place, another car, I mean. His

own is still in the apartment house garage. . . ."

"Or they were snatched," cried Stuart.

"No. They weren't snatched. Couldn't be. It was early evening. Place was busy. No way to get down except in the elevator. Boy took Polling down to the garage to get something out of his car, brought him up again to the lobby. Then the boy brought Mrs. Polling down to the lobby, and that's the last anybody saw of them. Plenty people round, too."

"Well, at least," said Stuart, "this proves my point. So let me out of here."

Coogan shook his head sadly, then he took a small roll of bills from his pocket and handed it to Stuart. "Here. From your boss. So you can have good food sent in."

"So I can what?" cried Stuart, taking the money.

"I'm sorry, Bob, but the Lieutenant just can't see his way clear to letting you go. Material witness. Your boss is working on it with a lawyer."

Stuart began to yell. "I want to make a deposition. Get that lawyer in here just as fast as you can. I've got rights. I'm a citizen. What is this, a Police State?" Stuart fumed and fretted up and down the narrow room, with Coogan trying to calm him.

Finally Coogan said: "All right, now. All right. Relax. I'll get the lawyer for you just as fast as I can."

"You'd better," yelled Stuart.

But as soon as Coogan had gone a curious change came over Stuart. He calmed down at once, counted the money Nolly had sent him — a lousy fifty dollars! — then he tiptoed to the door and glanced out into the corridor. Empty!

Now he transferred various items from his coat to his vest and trouser pockets, then he took off his coat, tossed it onto the cot with his hat, opened the door and started down the corridor to the private men's room. A uniformed policeman turned a corridor corner abruptly and they almost collided. The policeman looked at Stuart mildly — it seemed obvious he didn't know him from Adam.

"Okay to use this men's room?" asked Stuart.

"It's locked, I think," said the cop. "Who are you?"

"Reporter. *World*."

"Here. I'll unlock it for you," said the cop.

He unlocked the men's room door, then passed on with a friendly wave of the hand. Stuart called thanks, entered the men's room, and locked the door after him. Then he examined the window; it wasn't barred, but it opened onto a parking lot where there were several radio cars and quite a few Station employees moving about. Hopeless in the daytime!

He returned to the corridor and walked calmly and leisurely to the front vestibule. A sergeant at a

glassed-in desk was talking loudly on the phone. Stuart glanced at him mildly, then turned to his right, crossed the vestibule, went out the big, revolving front door, and down the worn granite steps to the sidewalk. Two cops passed him on their way in; they didn't even glance at him.

Stuart turned down a side street at once, then he crossed it diagonally and disappeared up an alley where commission-house trucks were already being loaded.

Two minutes later he was checking in at a cheap little hotel not three blocks from the Station. He signed the register as Nolly Walters, Jr. and said to the clerk, an old man who didn't seem to hear very well: "I left my coat in the car. I'll get it later. Been driving all night. Got to make a phone call, then I want to sleep."

"It's all right with me," said the old man, vaguely and indifferently.

Stuart went to the pay-phone booth in the lobby and called No-Neck Creeden, an ex-cop, ex-private detective, ex-bookie, ex-proprietor of a tip-sheet . . . Creeden was largely ex, including ex-convict, having served time on an attempted bribery charge. Creeden cursed Stuart for waking him up, then chuckled in his beery bass voice. "Where y'calling from, bud?" he inquired. "I hear they finally stuck you in the cooler — where you belong."

Creeden was an odd character. With tried and true friends he was

tough and honest; with others he was just tough. He said he'd be right over.

II.

Creeden listened in bored silence; but occasionally he smiled. Stuart was wearing an old coat of his he'd brought over. It hung on Stuart's rather spare frame like a flour sack.

When Stuart finished, Creeden asked: "What's in this for me?"

"A few bucks. My good will. I'm back on the *World* now."

"Think of that," said Creeden. "Why, you'll die rich. One question. Are you on the weed?"

"I know all this sounds pretty fishy. . . ."

"That is too weak a word."

"I know. Now listen. Find out everything you can about Mrs. Polling — especially where she came from. Give me that train schedule. I'll be checking. Get on the ball."

"I don't know how I get talked into these things," Creeden mumbled as he went out.

It was late afternoon before Creeden called in. He had quite a dossier on Mrs. Polling — but sadly enough all good. She was a highly respectable woman from a highly respectable downstate family.

"Hold the phone," cried Stuart, and for a few moments he studied the railroad time table; then he groaned. "No train from her home

town at the time we're looking for. Wait a minute! What's the matter with me?" cried Stuart suddenly. "What about her husband? Know where Dan Polling's from?"

"Why didn't you ask me that in the first place, save shoe leather. He's from my hometown."

"Is there a train from there that gets in around one in the morning?"

"There sure is, and it's a beauty. Stops at every bird's nest on the way."

"Get up here as quick as you can."

Stuart's mind was working too fast to get much of any place; thousands of ideas occurred to him, all wrong. He sent out for a sandwich and a bottle of beer. Afterwards, he felt a little drowsy and lay down to rest. Just as he was beginning to doze off a word began to run crazily through his mind: "Transco . . . Transco," and then it evolved into "Cotrans . . ." and half a dozen other forms until it turned into "Cusco . . ." and Stuart sat up, still half asleep, and observed: "That's in Mexico, isn't it? Or maybe South America?" and then he came fully awake and grunted wryly: "What am I talking about?" and then suddenly out of no place the word came to him: "Taxco."

He jumped off the bed, hit by a sudden revelation, and at that moment there was a scratch at the door and Creeden came in with a paper

in his hand. "You made print," he observed, pointing out a small item which read: *Witness in Taxi Driver Case Disappears.*

"I've been demoted from suspect, I guess," said Stuart; then: "What does the word 'Taxco' mean to you, Creeden?"

"That's it," shouted Creeden. "It's been running through my mind ever since you told me about it. The Taxco Armored Truck Robbery." Now Creeden sat down heavily. "Boy, oh, boy, do I have to tell you the rest? This friend of yours who got knocked off, he was just too nervous to spell, or even write straight, I guess."

"I'm afraid so," said Stuart with an odd expression.

"The guy he saw in that apartment must have been Maresh, also goes by the name of Merritt. He's been wanted for two months in that robbery — prime suspect."

"I had a real hunch this was a big one," said Stuart. "Got any ideas?"

"Yes. A big idea. I want out of this."

"Oh, come on now, Creeden."

"Well . . . I guess I've lived long enough, anyway — and to damn little purpose. But let's not forget what happened to Lou Jacks and almost what happened to you. When guys are playing for half a million dineros they play rough. Especially guys like Maresh, habitual — he'll go up for life if they catch him . . . so what's a few extra murder raps."

"Wait a minute. What do you

mean, playing for half a million bucks? They got that dough two months ago."

"Yeah," said Creeden, crestfallen.

"Hot money though, wasn't it?"

"Yeah."

"What would be the procedure then?"

"Why," said Creeden, "they'd sell it to a fence, a passer. Or they'd stash it, if they were wise, maybe for a year or two, till things cooled off."

"Right," said Stuart. "Now we're getting some place. Can you give me a rundown on Gunther and Polling?"

"Yeah," said Creeden. "Roughly. Gunther used to be known to the top boys as the undercover Big Fix. I think he'd been slipping lately, sick man. Polling is just a big drunk. Gunther carried him. In the old days, it was 'see Gunther' to quiet a serious beef."

"Fine," said Stuart, rising. "Let's take a little Drive-Yourself trip to Dan Polling's hometown."

"Mine too, don't forget."

"Are you sentimental about it?"

"No," said Creeden. "Just scared."

12.

As they were passing through a distant suburb, Creeden sighed and glanced over at Stuart, who was driving.

"Kid, I don't like this one. This is once we ought to coöperate. The coppers ought to at least have all

the information we've got — and also . . . maybe . . . know where we are — in case."

"Listen," said Stuart. "First place, I want to show Nolly what a whiz I am. You know he almost handed me the sports desk once? Second, don't underrate Nick Parshal . . . we don't get along but he is one very smart boy — shrewd as they come."

"Let's hope he's a genius," said Creeden, shuddering slightly.

It was night again when they arrived at the big sprawling upstate town on the lake. Stuart was parked on a dimly-lit side-street, waiting for Creeden, who was out on reconnaissance, to come back. It suddenly occurred to Stuart that he had no gun; visions of the newspaper pictures he had seen of Maresh, alias Merritt, began to rise before his eyes. What had Lou Jacks said? A big tough-looking monkey. And that was no exaggeration. According to the pictures, Maresh was a harsh, bleak-looking dark-haired man with an abnormally prominent chin that seemed solid as granite, and the unworried, penetrating but inward dark gaze of a large predatory animal.

"When No-Neck gets back," Stuart told himself, "we'll find a hock-shop and buy a gun."

The minutes passed slowly. Once a police car turned into the side-street and slid past him toward a

big lighted boulevard. He ignored it and did not even throw a glance in its direction, so he had no idea whether he was being observed or not. Later he heard loud sirens on the boulevard, and another police car tore past him and disappeared.

He grew more and more uneasy, but finally he saw the dark but unmistakably bull-necked and barrel-chested figure of Creeden turning the corner and coming toward him.

"No real luck," said Creeden. "They haven't showed in town. Polling's father — he's an old man — still lives here in the house where Dan was born. Dan's pretty prominent around here. Used to be in the State Legislature, you know. However, I talked to a guy I know real well and can pump. He says if they don't want to be seen they might be out at a cottage Dan owns on the lake. He says that way Dan wouldn't have to come through town; he'd just drive to Eliotsburg and cross over to Indian Point by motor boat, where the cottages are. Another thing. This guy hasn't heard anything about Mrs. Polling being here recently. So it sounds like the cottage."

Stuart nodded, then mentioned the hock-shop business to Creeden, who agreed.

"I know one," he said. "Always open. We better get some ammunition, too. We might need it. But I'd rather run than fight when it comes to guys like Maresh."

"We've got to defend ourselves,"

said Stuart, and Creeden laughed nervously.

The hock-shop was dark except for a nightlight, but a sad-looking middle-aged man let them in at once.

"Remember me, Charley?" asked Creeden.

"Sure," said Charley. "Where you been lately?"

"*Lately!*" cried Creeden. "I haven't been around here for over ten years."

"How time flies!"

Now a door creaked some place and Charley turned. A younger man, who might have been Charley's son or brother, stepped in from the back and whispered to Charley, whose jaw seemed to drop momentarily; then he said with averted eyes: "Would you fellows come into the back room? I'm supposed to be closed."

Creeden went through the portieres followed by Stuart. To their right in the dimness they saw two short, rather stocky young men with guns in their hands.

"Oh-oh!" said Creeden, sadly.

The young men ignored Stuart and Creeden for the moment, and one of them addressed Charley and his son — or brother — briefly: "We won't give you no trouble, Charley, if you don't give us none. We'll fade shortly. Just sit down and keep still."

"You boys are strangers," said Charley. "I'm solid in this town. Watch what you do."

"We'll watch."

Now the two of them turned their attentions to Stuart and Creeden and frisked them swiftly but expertly, extracting Creeden's gun.

"Don't you know me, No-Neck?" asked one. "I done a stretch with you."

"So did two thousand other cons," said Creeden.

"Do you know him?" asked Stuart, quickly.

"He's a young heavy," said Creeden. "Name's Whitey Goss."

Stuart started slightly but made no comment. Whitey Goss had been named a couple of times as a suspect in the Taxco Armored Truck robbery. They were getting close; maybe too close.

"I never did no time," said the other young thug, known as Speed. "I'm smarter than Whitey."

"Oh, sure," said Whitey. Now he turned Stuart around roughly and gave him a push. "What are you doing up here? We just seen you by accident-like and tailed you. What do you want in this town?"

"I might ask you the same thing," said Stuart. "You're from down-state, aren't you? Anyway, how did you know it was me? And what have I got to do with you?"

"You guys got no business in the big time, especially No-Neck here. He's strictly for the birds — yard birds. Look at Jacks."

"You look at him," said Stuart. "He's not pretty now."

"I thought they had you in the

can for the Jacks knockoff," said Speed.

"I climbed down a pipe."

"In Nick Parshal's jail? Oh, sure," exclaimed Speed.

"Is this straight you got canned off the *World* on Nick's say-so?" asked Whitey.

"Yes," said Stuart. "And he's trying to hang a bum rap on me, besides, and you know it's a bum rap."

"Hoosiers don't belong on the big time," said Whitey, severely. "You'll get yourself killed, Stuart."

"What are you talking about?"

Whitey looked at Stuart for a long time, then he took Speed aside for a conference. Finally Speed said: "There's only one thing to do. Keep 'em here. I'll go see."

Speed went out. They heard a car start up and leave. Whitey said: "Sit down, gents. We'll be here for a little while."

13.

Half an hour passed slowly. Whitey allowed Charley to wait on a couple of furtive, after closing-time customers. Finally Speed came back.

"Stuart," he called, "Come over to the door here."

Stuart walked over to the open door. There was a tall man standing just outside the door in the alley. The light was dim and Stuart could not see him very well. Besides, he had his hat pulled low and his coat collar turned up and he seemed to

have a scarf across the lower part of his face.

"Stuart," the man said, "you've got a good chance to get your head blown off."

Stuart felt a distinct chill. This was the man who had tried to deliver the telegram and he was pretty certain that it was the big boy himself — Maresh.

"I know."

"This Jacks — he was in it with you?"

"Looks like it, doesn't it?"

There was a brief pause. "I guess we got the same idea, coming up here. Know where Polling is?"

"I can't find him," said Stuart. "He's not home."

"Know where he could be?"

"Holed up in the big town, I guess."

Another pause. "Tell me one thing sucker. How did you get on to this deal?"

"Word gets around when there's a thing as big as half a million."

"Yeah," said the man, "but the whole business was an accident. Gunther kicking off, I mean. He was solid. Polling ratted at the last minute. You a friend of his?"

"No," said Stuart.

"Well, the hell with that," said the man. "I'm just figuring what to do with you and that cheap crook you got with you."

"Don't be calling people cheap crooks," said Stuart. "You're not doing too good. You let Polling's missus get away with all the money,

and plant it. And then you let the Pollings get away from you."

"We had problems," said the man, calmly. "We snatched Polling, but brought him back when you and Jacks got into the act. You put the heat all over us. You spoiled the shot, Mac; and I'm for dumping you in the lake with enough lead in you to make you sink." Now he turned to Whitey. "Get 'em in the car. What's the use of talking?"

"I don't like it," said Whitey, "dragging these guys clear through town. You're wanted bad, my friend. They may be looking here as well as other places."

"Why here?" cried the man, impatiently. "What would I be doing here? But okay — if you don't want to drag 'em around, knock 'em off here in the alley."

"And spoil it for Charley in this town?"

"Okay," cried the man irritably. "Knock 'em off your way. I'm getting fed up with all these bum angles."

"First thing is," said Whitey, "get 'em out of Charley's place."

Stuart and Creeden were herded out into the alley and Charley hastily shut the door on the whole party.

"Walk up the alley ahead of us," said Whitey, "and don't try to run."

"Why not?" asked Stuart with dry lips. "We get it anyway, don't we?"

"And I was dragged into this for

peanuts!" muttered Creeden, dolefully.

There was a brief silence.

"Look," said Stuart, "maybe I'd better come clean with you."

"Maybe you had," said the man.

"Maybe I know where the Pollings are."

"Maybe you don't."

"Maybe I could take you there."

"You think this is square?" Whitey asked the man.

"No," said the man. "If he knew, he'd be there now. By the way, what were you doing in that hockshop?"

"I went in to buy a gun."

"Why?"

"Before I called on the Pollings. I was afraid he might be sober for a change."

There was a long silence. Finally Stuart broke in, stalling. "You cut me in, I'll take you there."

The man laughed harshly. "He's making deals yet." He laughed again. "Okay, wise guy. You take me there . . . I'll see you're took care of."

14.

They drove north along the river, toward the lake road under Creeden's directions. They were all in one car, the unknown man and Creeden in front; Whitey, Speed, and Stuart in the back. Stuart sat in the middle.

He kept talking. "No reason why we can't all get rich. Five hundred grand is a lot of money, plenty for all. Don't you agree, boys?"

He went on and on. Finally the unknown man turned half around and cried: "Cut the yack — or we'll drop you off the next bridge."

"Unpleasant character," said Stuart, "all I'm trying to do is make us all rich. Lucky you guys ran into me." He began to talk at random.

"Please, Bob," begged Creeden, "keep it down a little. You're bending our ears."

Ahead of them now the far southern end of the big lake began to glimmer in the moonlight. Clusters of lights showed on the west bank. After a few hundred yards, the road took an odd turning and began to wind across marshy land. The road rose higher and higher on its steep embankments. Sheets of water could be seen on either side, and thousands of frogs were sending up a loud, continuous chatter.

Stuart started to yack it up again. Suddenly the unknown man turned and began to shout at him, wildly irritated; and at that moment, Stuart leaped forward, pushed the man roughly aside, grabbed the wheel and swung it violently over.

The tires shrieked piercingly; the car careened, almost went over on its side, then, with a sickening lurch it left the road, bounded down the embankment, and went into the marsh with a tremendous splash, and lay on its side, two wheels still spinning rapidly. Creeden was thrown clear, through an open window, but lay face down in the mud under a foot of water, unable to extricate

himself for the moment. Stuart, lying on top of Whitey, kicked the back door open and crawled out. Speed, half-stunned, made a feeble effort to grab his legs, but was kicked in the face for his trouble.

"Creeden! Creeden!" cried Stuart, looking about him wildly.

Creeden rose at Stuart's feet like some water monster, Stuart grabbed him and they ran diagonally up the embankment. Behind them they heard cursing and splashing, then two shots were fired and bullets sang low over their heads, far too close for comfort.

But they had made the road now.

"Woods up to your left," gasped Creeden, through mud, water and marsh-weed.

But before they could get started, a spotlight sprang on and picked them up, blinding them. And a familiar voice called: "Halt! Police! Halt, or I'll fire."

They stopped. Stuart turned and shook hands with Creeden. "Did you notice the voice? My old pal, Nick Parshal."

A short while later the police fished three mud-soaked and cursing wretches out of the marsh.

Nick Parshal regarded them impassively. "Maresh, Goss, and a young punk I never saw before."

"His name's Speed," said Stuart, helpfully.

"Thanks," said Nick; then he turned to two radio cops. "You're to take all five prisoners back to town — in two cars."

"All five — *what?*" shouted Stuart.

"You heard me," said Nick; then he turned to the cops again. "But hold off with Stuart and Creeden till I question them. Get the other three started."

Later, Creeden and Stuart rode back to the big town in silence. The two young cops in the front seat kept smiling.

15.

Now they were all sitting in the Lieutenant's office: Stuart, Creeden, Coogan, Nolly Walters, and Nick.

Nick seemed more relaxed than usual, almost human, Stuart thought. "I was right up there on the second floor watching you make your getaway," Nick explained to Stuart. "We set it up for you. We knew you'd blow."

There was a general, goodnatured laugh, but Stuart did not join in.

Nick went on: "So . . . we just followed all your movements."

"What about the Pollings?" asked Stuart, suppressing his desire to have a row with Nick.

"You were right. They were at the cottage, playing the radio as if they didn't have a care in the world. Polling came clean. His wife didn't know what was going on. She just did as he told her. We got the money."

Noticing the expression on Stuart's face, Nolly Walters restrained his smiles and said: "Great job, Bob.

Top news story. I always did say . . ."

"One more question," Bob broke in, interrupting his boss. "Why were you so sure I'd lead you into something, Nick?"

"What kind of a word is 'sure'?" Nick demanded. "Nothing's sure. I'm going to tell you the truth, Bob. I still hadn't made up my mind about you."

"Now look here, Lieutenant," cried Coogan, indignantly.

"I've seen guys go wrong before," said Nick, ignoring Coogan. "And they're almost always the impulsive type, like our friend here."

Stuart's face was red with suppressed rage. It was leave now or

have a row with Nick. "Come on, Creeden," he said. "Let's lam out of here."

Just as they started out, Detective Smith, Coogan's helper, hurried in with an eager look in his eyes.

"Coogan," he said, "good news. We found the bullet."

"What bullet?" Coogan demanded, staring at him blankly.

"Why, the bullet Mr. Stuart fired from his gun. It was buried in some dirt at the bottom of the court."

Stuart patted Smith on the back. "Good work, Sherlock," he said. "This means promotion."

Stuart and Creeden went out. Coogan shook with laughter. But Nick, as usual, was not amused.



Captain Conway knew who'd murdered the little man, but he couldn't make the arrest. The killer's fans wouldn't like it if he were put in jail.

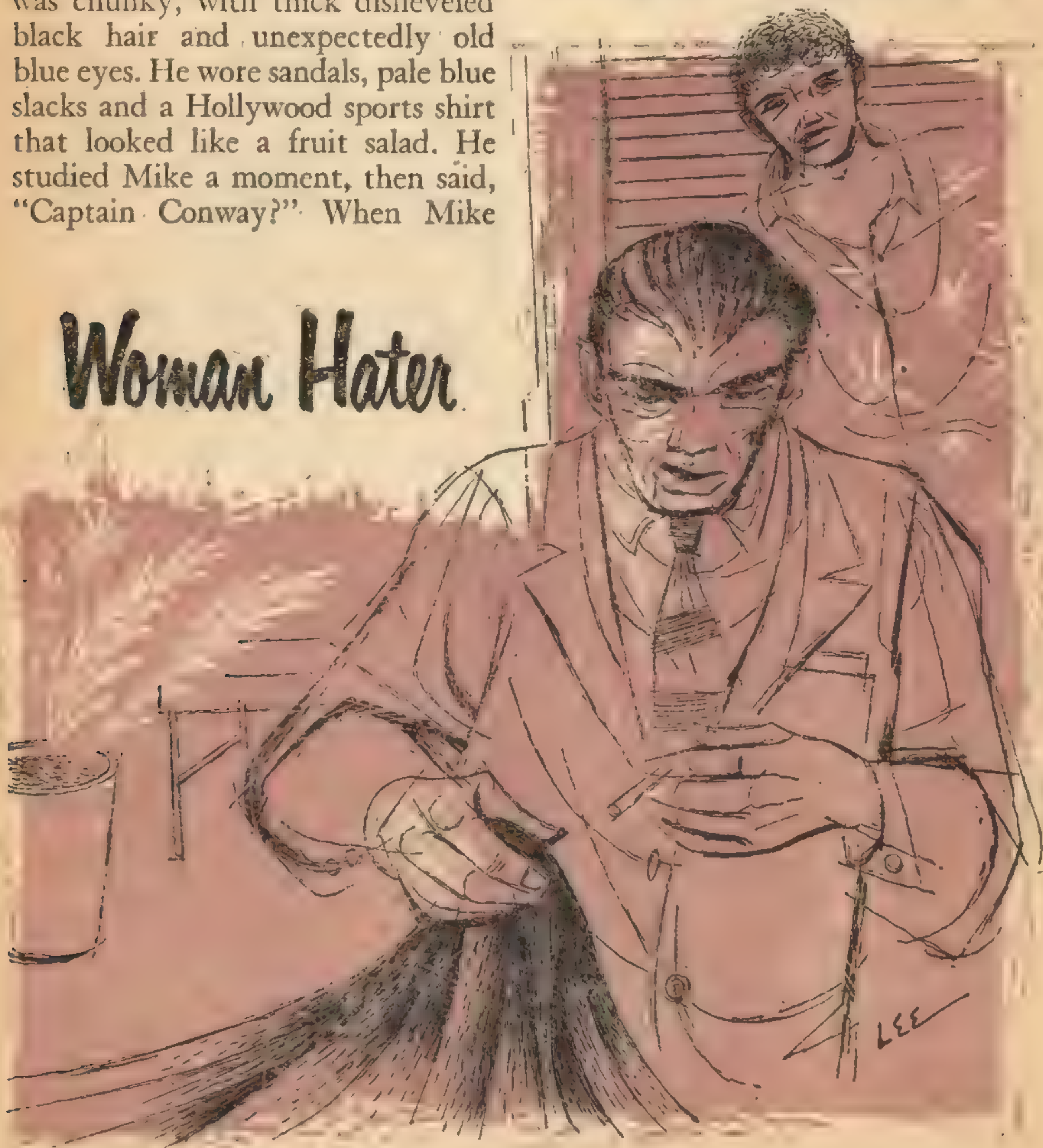
BY SAM MERWIN, JR.

THE man who opened the door of 811-12-14 at the Grand Plaza was chunky, with thick disheveled black hair and unexpectedly old blue eyes. He wore sandals, pale blue slacks and a Hollywood sports shirt that looked like a fruit salad. He studied Mike a moment, then said, "Captain Conway?" When Mike

nodded, he added, "I'm Johnny Ferris — I'm the guy who called in." He stood aside to let Mike pass.

Mike walked slowly inside and looked around. He had been in the

Woman Hater



Grand Plaza's equivalent of a royal suite twice before — once, when General Hap Arnold came through town, during the war, again when Adlai Stevenson stopped over to make a speech at the college during his unsuccessful Presidential campaign of 1952. It looked just the same — plush, expensive and wearing a faint smell of disuse familiar to Mike from the horsehair upholstery of the front parlor in his own boyhood home.

But on the two previous visits, there had been no blood splashed on the walls that met in the southeast corner, no lumpy bundle lying concealed under a stained green blanket. Mike went over and pulled it back and looked at the body that lay beneath. Veteran cop that he was, he felt his stomach muscles tighten involuntarily at what he saw there.

The face of Ezzard Charles, in the final round of his first fight with Rocky Marciano, had not been battered into such a shapeless pulp as that of the little man who lay dead on the carpet. Mike thought, *This will be a closed-coffin job for sure.* The poor devil looked as if he'd caught his head in a rock-crusher. Steeling himself, Mike bent and drew the sticky wallet from his breast pocket.

"Know him?" Johnny Ferris asked as Mike, after going through its contents, stuffed cards and money back into the wallet and returned it to the corpse's pocket.

"Yeah," said Mike. "Character named Simpson — Dick Simpson. Bookie's runner—small-timer. We've had him up a couple of times but his boss got him off." He turned back to Johnny Ferris and asked, "How'd it happen?"

Johnny Ferris sounded a little too quick, a little too glib, a little too pat. He said, "I took some of your local press out on the town after the Lion finished his last show at the Cosmopolitan. You know — regular routine in my job. The Lion was bushed and came right to the hotel. When I got here, our friend was like that" — he nodded toward the body, again concealed by the blanket — "and the Lion was in that chair by the wall, having himself hysterics. I got him calmed down and put him in his room and called Headquarters."

Yeah, thought Mike, but not before you called the Mayor and put handcuffs on me. It was not the first time this had happened to Mike, in his fifteen years on the force, but repetition didn't make it a bit more palatable. Briefly, he weighed the factors of the case as he knew them.

"The Lion" was Lyon Wister, Hollywood's newest and hottest he-man star. He had been born Willy Lyons, over in the West End, and had been a bully, a seducer and car-thief — an all-around juvenile delinquent — until the town had grown too hot for him. What had happened to him since, Mike didn't know — but here he was, back home

as the conquering hero, Hollywood style, for the world premiere of his newest-beefcake epic. He had beaten a man to death in his hotel suite and Mike, as chief of detectives, had been sent over to see that the matter was disposed of without publicity, favorable or otherwise.

He wondered what had really happened. He couldn't figure out why a minor-league margin-operator, like Dick Simpson, would come to the star's suite. Simpson had not got into the rackets until a couple of years after Willy Lyons left town. Frowning, he said, "What did Willy — Wister, I mean — tell you?"

Johnny Ferris ran a hand through his unruly black hair. He said, "The Lion says he caught the creep here when he came in. The poor jerk was trying to burgle the suite. He tried to fight his way out and the Lion beat him up — and the little man died."

"Anything here worth stealing?" Mike asked. There were a lot of other questions, but he wanted to put them to Willy — to the Lion. He found it hard to think of Willy in his new resplendence.

Johnny Ferris shrugged. "Not a hell of a lot," he said. "The Lion travels light — for a star. But you know how it is — the creep probably thought he could walk off with a few sets of diamond studs or maybe a wad of cash. You know the ideas people in the sticks have about Hollywood."

Mike resented that "people from

the sticks," as he resented everything else about the case. But he didn't show it. Instead, he said, "What do you want me to do about it?"

The years fell away from Johnny Ferris as he put on his selling personality. His voice became lower, friendlier, more confidential, as he said, "Listen, Captain, you know how delicate a Hollywood reputation is. You take some good-looking husky kid out of a garage or a factory. You work with him, you teach him to speak so people can understand him, you give him acting lessons so he won't shoot his cuffs or fall over his own clumsy size twelves.

"You get him a decent wardrobe, you test him till you know which side of his pretty puss looks best in front of the camera, you pose him for publicity stills, you get him written up in the fan mags, you give him a spot in a picture or two — and you sit back and chew your nails while you wait for the public's reaction. Meanwhile, all you're out is a couple of hundred gees with no return."

"Yeah?" Mike was interested in spite of himself. Perhaps because he sensed the dislike Johnny Ferris shared with him for the creature that had been born Willy Lyons.

"That's just the start," Johnny Ferris went on wearily. "If the public doesn't react, you cut bait and write it off to experience. But if they go for your boy, your troubles are only beginning. From then on,

you've got a property and you've got to build and protect it. You put him in tailor-made parts, you spot him around the night clubs and race tracks with starlets and established actresses, you create a personality for the public. Before you know it, you're in for a couple of million bucks. And one breath of bad publicity, one false note in your melody, can wipe you out."

"So, Mike repeated, "what do you want me to do about it?"

"Do I have to paint you a picture?" Johnny Ferris countered. "The Lion's done nothing wrong. Anybody could hit a thief too hard."

"Maybe," said Mike, thinking of the sadistic beating this new idol of the bobby soxers had given the little man who died.

"Not maybe—sure!" Johnny Ferris contradicted. "You haven't met the Lion. He's a mass of muscle—he doesn't know his own strength that's all. Just a big, overgrown, good-natured kid—that's the secret of his charm. One thing we've built up all the way—in his pictures, he never kills anybody. If a villain dies, it's because he falls over a cliff or something. But the Lion never kills—get it?"

"I'm beginning to," said Mike, struggling to hide his distaste. Maybe he didn't know Lyon Wister—but he knew Willy Lyons. He was beginning to remember things about Willy, some of the kids he'd beat up just to show his own strength, some

of the robberies he'd committed, some of the girls he'd run out on.

And he couldn't do a thing about Willy—not now. He was handcuffed. The administration was trying to build up the city as a convention center. The syndicate that owned the Grand Plaza had a great big in at City Hall. If any bad publicity came out of it, they'd say, "This is going to scare off the Amalgamated Plumbers meeting next month—they'll go to Chicago instead." Or it might be the Widget Sales Representatives annual meeting—or any of hundreds of others.

Mike was going to have to cover up for Willy Lyons, whether he liked it or not. If he didn't, they'd say, "The city loses two million bucks cash money because a cheap grifter gets himself killed trying to rob a visiting movie star named Lyon Wister, just because a cop goes Boy Scout over it." Mike looked at Johnny Ferris and knew the other man was as aware of the angles as he was. He said, "I'd like to talk to your boy."

Johnny Ferris hesitated, then shrugged. He said, "Well, okay—but the Lion may not make too much sense. He started tilting the bottle after it happened. He was pretty well along when I got here."

Which partially answered one of Mike's unasked questions—what had happened between the time Willy killed Simpson and Johnny Ferris got back from entertaining the press—the "local press" he'd

called them. So Willy had panicked and turned to the bottle . . .

There was blood on Lyon Wister's right sleeve, staining it from wrist to shoulder. There was blood on the whole right side of his shirt. There was a smudge of carmine on the left wing of his collar. And there was a sneer on his lips as he said, "Well, well — so they had to send the hero. How are you, Conway? Still making a living running around after kids?"

Mike battled an almost overwhelming desire to go to work on Willy. Though the star towered over him by almost a foot, though he was younger and, despite recent drinking, a magnificent animal, Mike figured out just how he could take him. He'd come in low and fast and weaving, stamp on his foot, punch him twice in the gut, then bring his head up hard and split that too-handsome face right up the middle. A happy thought.

But he said, "Cut the comedy, Hollywood boy. Whether either of us likes it or not, I've got to ask you some questions. The sooner you give me some straight answers, the sooner we can say good-by."

Under Johnny Ferris' watchful eye, the actor behaved himself, even though his whole manner expressed his desire to throw his new found weight around. When he was finished, Mike said, "Just sit tight, both of you — stay in the bedroom and keep the door shut. I'll call you when it's okay to come out."

Willy Lyons said, blazing his

hatred of all cops, especially one named Mike Conway, "Who the hell are you to tell us what to do?"

Mike didn't answer — he couldn't and keep his temper. He just looked meaningfully at Johnny Ferris and walked out of there. Ferris followed him to the door of the suite. He said "Thanks for keeping the lid on. The Lion didn't tell me you'd had trouble before. And don't think my employers or I are going to forget this. You'll be hearing from —"

"Thanks," said Mike quietly. "But it looks like you've got enough troubles for a while."

He went downstairs and talked to Ben Collingwood, the manager of the Grand Plaza. Collingwood, a straw-colored man who wore a carnation in his lapel and sported a small, pale mustache, went white when Mike told him the score. But he agreed that the best way to handle it was to get the body out secretly and dump it somewhere out of town. He said, "Thank God, they sent you over on it, Mike."

"Yeah," said Mike. "You better get busy. I can't sit on this thing forever, even with City Hall backing the cover-up. I'll wait right here till it's all over."

He sat for an hour, when a still-white Ben Collingwood came in and said, in a hoarse, unsteady voice that suggested he'd just been sick, "Okay, Mike, it's done. And thanks again for playing ball. I hate to think what might have happened if one of those meatheads on the D.A.'s staff

had got on it, instead of you."

"Forget it," said Mike, hating himself. He picked up the phone in Ben Collingwood's office, asked operator for Suite 811-12-14. When Johnny Ferris answered, Mike said, "You can come out now. It's okay."

Johnny Ferris sounded grateful. He said, "Listen, Conway — we wind up our pitch here tomorrow night. How about coming up for a little party after the last show? Say, eleven-fifteen. Ask for the moon with red hair and you can have it."

"I'll think about that," said Mike. "Count on me." He had no intention of getting mixed up either with Ferris or with his precious property again if he could help it. He hung up, frowning. There was something out of whack, some discrepancy his eyes or ears or nose had registered that his brain had not yet picked up. It probably meant nothing, but it bothered him all the way home and into bed and in bed, until he went to sleep dreaming of the raw-meat face of the little man who died. It had been no ordinary beating that killed him. It was the job of a sadist giving free rein to his perversion.

But the discrepancy didn't lie in the dead man's face . . .

Late the following morning, before he reported for work, Mike dropped in at the "local press" — the *Herald Clarion*. Ryan, the city editor, grinned at him over the battery of telephones on his desk. He said, "Come to look at your picture again?"

It was there on the city room wall,

part of a blown-up photomontage of important news events in the city over the past ten years. A *Herald-Clarion* camera had caught Mike just as he crashed the door of a frame house where the nationally wanted Morgan mob had holed up after breaking out of state prison. The photographer had won a prize for the shot and Mike had won a medal he didn't want — along with a lot of publicity he wanted even less and some reward money he could and did use.

Mike managed a grin at Ryan and said, "They could have shot my other profile — that's my bad side." Then, "Mollie Green in?"

Ryan nodded and, ignoring the curiosity in the editor's eyes, Mike went on through the city room to a corridor lined with glass-doored cubicles. He knocked on one which bore the legend, *Movies and Drama*, and, in smaller letters underneath, *Melinda Green*. He opened it, stuck his head through, said, "Hi, Mollie, got a minute?"

"For you — yes," she replied, nodding toward a chair covered with mimeographed press releases, a sheaf of glossy stills and a Coca-Cola carton with a broken straw and a squeezed-out slice of lemon inside. Mike pushed the litter onto the floor and sat down while his hostess finished typing.

Finally, after calling for a copy boy and giving him her story, she sat back, brushed greying brown hair off a broad, bulging forehead, lit

a cigarette and said, "What brings you here, Mike?"

"This time, I regret to say, 'tis not your Irish charm I'm after," he told her. "Frankly, I'd like to know a Hollywood thing or two about that brand new pride of our fair city, Lyon Wister — and very much off the record, so turn your tape recorder off."

She sighed and said, "One of these days you'll come groveling and whimpering to me on your knees and I'll lift my dainty slippered foot and kick you right on the tip of that button nose of yours." They had gone through high school together. She shot a keen glance his way and added, "Why the Lion, Mike — something up?"

"I don't know," he replied untruthfully. "If there is, you'll be the first to get it. Now, what about Wister — what's the lowdown? I've lost track of him since Willy Lyons was run out of town."

"All that glitters . . ." she said absently, marshaling her thoughts. Then, "If you're holding a story out on me, Michael Conway, I really will kick your ugly face in." She looked at him hopefully, saw he was not going to talk, said, "You know the Lyon Wister build-up, the public personality?"

"That," he said, "is what I don't want. Is there anything else."

She frowned, then told him, "According to the grapevine, he's the biggest studio headache since Lawrence Tierney last got pinched for

brawling in public. He likes the ladies a bit too well — I can't honestly blame him for that, but it doesn't go too well with that shining white-knight personality they've put him in. But the main problem, the way I hear it, is he gets just so many drinks in him and he goes berserk if anybody flips ashes on the rug. And when he goes berserk, he beats people up. Not pretty beating, either."

"How come it hasn't become common knowledge?" Mike asked.

"Luck, plus the fact Johnny Ferris, his manager, is one of the best human watchdogs that ever lived," said Mollie.

"What about Ferris?" Mike asked her.

"I could go for him without half trying if he'd give me a tumble," Mollie replied. "But he's got the finest in females following him around in flocks wherever he goes." She sighed, stopped dreaming, added, "Mike, if you don't tell me what this is all about I'll go out of my mind, I swear it."

"It will never miss you, Mollie," said Mike, getting up. "Thanks a lot — and one of these days, I'll give you a rundown."

"Get out of here and let me go crazy in private," she said.

He got to his own desk, still thinking about Dick Simpson's brutally battered face. The body had been found in a culvert on the outskirts of town, shortly before eight o'clock that morning, and was currently

reposing in the city morgue. Mike looked over the preliminary reports, noted that Simpson had an estranged wife who had not been located. He called in an aide and asked him about her. The aide, a slim, tall, bespectacled young sergeant with hair on the backs of his hands, said, "His landlady says she left late yesterday afternoon — and she was only in her room an hour or so then. She's been away most of the last two days."

"Where is she — the landlady?" Mike asked.

She proved to be waiting in an outer office. She was a gaunt, weathered woman with streaked, faded blonde hair and an expression of harried good nature. She said, "I just know that no-good husband of Peggy's has done something to her. He's been calling her up and threatening her ever since she ran away from him and came to live with me. And yesterday, he was around, asking for her, just a little while after she went out. I just know he . . ."

Drawing the woman out carefully, Mike got her story. Peggy Simpson, according to her, was a thoroughly sweet young woman, who had been awarded a back-of-the-hand deal by life. She was an orphan who had managed to pass a business course the hard way and get a good secretarial job. Then she had met Dick Simpson and Simpson had talked her into marrying him.

From then on, Peggy's course had been downhill. It was, to Mike, a

familiar but never pleasant story. Living in cheap apartments and drab hotel rooms, enduring Simpson's erratic existence and his two arrests, being "nice" to his bosses. Said Peggy's landlady, "Peggy told me all about it — not all at once; it seeped out in driblets. Finally, when she had the last miscarriage, she ran out on him. She came to live with me and took a part-time job to keep going until she could decide about a divorce. I told her to get rid of that no-good a thousand times if I told her once. But she still thought maybe he'd straighten out. Some people never learn."

"I know," said Mike. "Did you know Simpson's dead?"

"I heard," said the landlady stoutly, "and good riddance, too! Sooner or later, he'd have ruined Peggy for keeps."

Mike sent her home and ordered lunch sent in while he tried to fit this new piece into the puzzle — if it fitted at all. He looked down at the carton of coffee on his desk and thought of the dead Coca-Cola carton on the chair in Mollie Green's office. There had been a crescent of near-purple lipstick on the rim of Mollie's.

Something clicked into place. Simpson lying dead in Lyon Wister's suite, Simpson's wife vanished. Mike felt pretty sure the long-suffering Peggy had not beaten her wayward spouse to death — not unless she had fists like an Amazon, which did not fit her description. According to the

landlady, Peggy was a soft, pretty, gentle, romantic girl.

Romantic! Mike knew now what his mind had failed to register the night before. It was the carmine stain on the left tip of Lyon Wister's collar. Its color had not matched the darkening crimson of the blood-stains on the other side of the star's shirt. Therefore, it had not been blood. Mike had an odds-on hunch it was lipstick. And logic told him the stain could only have come from one source — Peggy Simpson, the missing wife of the little man who died.

It all added up. Peggy, by her landlady's account, was an impressionable, love-starved young woman. Willy Lyons, on his early record, had been among other things a seduction artist — and Lyon Wister, according to Mollie Green, was reputed to be over-fond of the ladies. No wonder the star had raced back to the hotel after his final show the night before — he'd had a date with Peggy. Peggy, wallowing in a brief romantic heaven, must have been with him most of the past two or three days. She'd been away from her lodging that long. And Dick Simpson had been on her trail.

What did it add up to? The old badger game, with the one added wrinkle that, in this instance, the girl in the case might not have been part of the play. Evidently, Dick Simpson had got wind of his wife's romance with the star and had decided to combine the pleasure of

revenge with the business of shaking down Peggy's lover. Which would explain why a furious and probably drunken Lyon Wister had beaten the little man to death.

It would even explain the cover-up story Johnny Ferris had told Mike about the star catching Simpson in the act of burgling the suite. It would explain all the little pieces that had not quite fallen into proper place. Except for one — what had become of Peggy Simpson and why had they failed to mention her to Mike? After all, when you ask a chief of detectives to cover up a killing, you shouldn't mind a badger game.

Mike looked at a snapshot of Peggy Simpson someone had dug up. It showed a smiling, sensitive looking young woman with a fragile girl's figure. She stood on a beach in her bathing suit, with one hand raised to keep soft light hair from blowing across her pretty face. She looked like a girl as nice as her landlady had believed her to be. A kid like that caught with a rat like Simpson — and then finding romantic fulfillment with a rat like Willy Lyons — and then, through the viciousness of both men, getting caught in a vicious, sordid, murderous mess.

Mike pushed a button that summoned his tall young assistant — the one with spectacles and hair on the back of his hands. He finished the last of his coffee while the young man waited, then said, "Pete, how'd you like an outside job with me?"

Pete's usually serious eyes lit up

behind his spectacles. He said, "You kidding, Captain?"

Mike looked at his watch, saw that it was matinee time, that Wister and Johnny Ferris would be at the theater. He said, "Let's go."

He had a horrible sick feeling they were already too late.

They ducked the lobby crowd in the hotel by going in through the service entrance, walking to the second floor and taking the elevator from there. The door of Suite 811-12-14 had a *Do Not Disturb* sign hanging from the knob.

Mike said, "Open her up, Pete."

Pete studied the lock for a brief moment, then pulled a little black leather folder from his hip pocket. Silently he went to work on the door, testing it with a series of skeleton keys. Within thirty seconds, he had it open and Mike stepped inside and motioned him to follow and shut the door behind him. He thought, *I'm a lousy cop; I took it for granted the third room in this suite was Ferris'. I should have looked anyway.*

Collingwood's staff had done a good job of getting most of the bloodstains off the living room walls. They couldn't clean up the mess a hundred per cent, of course — he had a hunch they'd have to repaper for that. They'd done a good job in the second bedroom, too — the one he'd failed to check the night before. They'd moved the furniture around so it covered the worst of the dull, dark stains on the side wall, they'd

put the bed over the bigger stain on the floor. But the stains were there if you knew enough to look for them.

When they were outside and back in the car again, Pete said, "Where do we go from here, Captain?"

"We make the rounds of the hospitals," Mike told him.

They found her in the second one they tried—the Orthopedic, a small, semi-private affair, patronized by the city's well-to-do. She was alone in a private room with the shades drawn and, if she had been pretty once, she was pretty no more. Looking at the cruel wreckage of Peggy's face, Mike wondered why she hadn't died like her husband. He had a hunch she'd have been a lot better off.

She spoke indistinctly, through broken teeth with a swollen tongue. Her voice was a monotone, numbed with sedatives and shock. She said, "I know he's dead — I saw Lyon kill him. I'm not sorry he's dead — trying a filthy trick like that. But why did Lyon have to do this to me? I loved him — I'd have died for him. I didn't even know where Dick was. If I'd known what he was going to do, I'd have warned Lyon. Why did he do this to me?" Tears flowed down her torn and purple cheeks.

"Was Ferris there when it happened?" Mike asked her with a sort of fierce gentleness. He had to know.

She shook her head vehemently on the pillow, then gasped as the

motion hurt her. She said, "When Mr. Ferris came in — he made Lyon stop beating me. I wish he hadn't. I wish he'd let Lyon kill me, too. I'd never have let Dick blackmail him."

She began to cry again and the doctor, who was standing by, said, "That's all the time I can give you, Captain." Outside, when Mike asked him about her, the doctor shook his head and added, "Oh, we can give her a face — maybe a prettier one than she had to begin with. But we can't heal what's under the skin. A woman's system isn't the same after a shock like that. She'll always be nervous — and I'm afraid there'll always be some pain. You can rebuild crushed tissue, but not crushed nerves . . ."

Mike said, "Thanks, Doc — and I'd appreciate it if you'd keep this little visit of mine under your hat. Has there been any arrangement made for her — financially, I mean?"

"Mr. Ferris was more than generous," the doctor replied with a coldness that showed Mike he shared his own cop's hatred for anyone even indirectly connected with the brutality that had put Peggy Simpson in such condition. He added, "I haven't seen a beating like this since you busted up that big South Side hoodlum two years back."

Mike gave him a level look, said, "That was different, Doc."

The physician nodded and said, "Yes, that was different." Then, "It's none of my business, Mike, but what are you going to do?"

Mike looked at him blankly, said, "Do? When did I ever *do* anything?" He got out of there fast.

A sober-looking Johnny Ferris and Lyon Wister were waiting for Mike when he walked alone into Suite 811-12-14 at sixteen minutes past eleven. They were alone — evidently they were holding back on party plans until they found out what Mike wanted to do. Ferris put a drink in Mike's hand and said, "I wasn't kidding about the moon with red hair — or blonde or brunette either. Name your poison, Mike. You've earned it."

Mike said, not angrily, not even reproachfully, just stating a fact, "You characters didn't level with me last night." He didn't dare look directly at Willy Lyons-Lyon Wister lest his eyes reveal the hatred he felt for the one-time hoodlum.

Their exchange of glances was swift, alert, frightened. Johnny Ferris said, "What are you driving at, Mike? If you're not satisfied, I can promise you we'll make arrangements to —"

"It's not that," said Mike. "It's not that at all. It's just that you didn't tell me Willy here was still going around beating people's brains out. You prettied him up like I was a critic."

Their relief would have been comic under other circumstances. Johnny Ferris ran thick fingers through his thick black hair and

said, "Hell, Mike, I'm a press agent for my sins and I just can't seem to get out of the habit of giving a client the best of it." He smiled his tired, charming smile, added, "Shall we roll the party?"

"In just a little," said Mike. "The point I'm trying to make is that maybe *I* can do something for your client."

"You've done more than enough for us already," said Johnny Ferris. Then, curious, "What did you have in mind?"

"I want to talk to Willy — alone," said Mike. And, as Johnny Ferris looked troubled, "Don't worry, I'm not going to start anything. But if you'll take a walk for twenty minutes and dig up that red-headed moon you mentioned, I can tell Willy a thing or two that should keep him out of trouble for a long time to come."

Johnny Ferris spread his hands and said, "Jesus, Mike, the Lion's been talked to by experts. Why, even I —"

The star interrupted with, "Let him try, Johnny. After all, what can he do? Maybe I'll get some kicks out of it."

And Mike repeated, "Don't worry, Johnny — I'm not going to start anything. All I want is twenty minutes alone with him. I think maybe you owe me that. You can forget about the red-head, too, if you'd prefer it. All I want is twenty minutes."

Johnny Ferris shook his head and

said, "Okay then, go ahead — but you'll be wasting your wind. He's got tin ears."

"I know," said Mike, "but I still want to try."

"Let him, Johnny," said Willy contemptuously. "take a powder. And bring the red-head back anyway. I can handle a half dozen of them the way I feel tonight."

When they were alone together, Willy eyed Mike curiously. And Mike walked over and filled his glass, extended the bottle toward the star. "How about you?" he asked.

"Sure, why not," said Willy, laughing. "I sure never thought I'd be buying you a drink, Conway. But I got to hand it to you, you did a nice smooth job last night. Sometimes it doesn't pay to play the hero."

"Bottoms up," said Mike. The star was laughing at him inside, too. He was laughing at him because he was invulnerable, because he'd killed a man and made Mike cover up for him, because he'd all but killed a woman and didn't know Mike knew about it. He was laughing at Mike because he'd gotten away with murder and a little bit more.

"Good whiskey," said Mike, thankful that he'd taken the precaution to line his stomach with olive oil.

"The best," said Willy. They had another.

About two more should do it, Mike thought. He intended to keep

his word to Johnny Ferris not to start anything. But he hadn't said a word about not hitting back if the star made the first pass. It might cost him his job, but he didn't think so. Not when they learned about Peggy Simpson and what Willy had done to her. Not when Willy was through in Hollywood. Then Willy'd be just another hood who'd asked for it.

In a way, Mike was sorry for Johnny Ferris—he seemed like a very straight guy. But when you covered up for a rat like Willy, you were asking for it. Besides, there'd be other Willy Lyonses for Johnny to handle.

It was just about time. Willy was beginning to talk loud. Mike remembered what Mollie Green had told him that morning. "... he gets just so many drinks in him and he goes beserk if anybody flips ashes

on the rug. And when he goes beserk, he beats people up."

Mike looked at his watch. He had nine minutes left of the twenty. Plenty of time for what he had to do. Come in low and fast and weaving, stamp on his foot, punch him twice in the gut, then bring his head up hard and split that too-handsome face right up the middle. And keep right on dealing the same until Willy's face was worse than Peggy Simpson's.

He stood up. He got ready to spill a few verbal ashes on the rug. He said, "Willy, you jerk, who'd you ever beat except undersized runts like Simpson and women like his wife?"

He waited for the reaction. If Willy laughed, he'd failed. But Willy didn't laugh. He threw his glass at Mike and came toward him with a snarl. It was time to get busy.



What's Your Verdict?

BY SAM ROSS

THE THREE BOYS all carried guns. They didn't expect any trouble, but, as Larry, the oldest of the trio, said: "It's just better to be prepared, that's all. You never know what you'll run into." They were going to rob a bank.

Larry was twenty-four. Al was twenty-one and Jack, the youngest of the three, was nineteen. They'd been making a small living from filling-station hold-ups for over a year and, now, they'd decided to move into the big time. They set the bank hold-up for three o'clock in the afternoon, just when the bank would be closing. At that time, they figured, all the cash would be on hand, and there might not be so many customers to worry about. It looked like a cinch.

Promptly at two-fifty-five they walked into the bank. They idled around for a few minutes, and then Larry walked quietly up to the teller's cage and slipped a note through:

"I'm holding a gun. Pass the money over or else."

The teller was too frightened to do anything other than obey. Al

and Jack were standing around, ready to fire in case of trouble — but there wasn't any trouble at all. The teller handed over a bag of money and Larry started out, Al and Jack following him. The few late customers didn't seem to notice a thing.

Then somebody yelled: "Stop them! Robbing the bank . . . !" and the bank guard drew his gun and fired once, high.

Jack was the first to reach for his gun. Clawing it out, he stared around nervously, stock-still in the center of the bank floor. Al and Larry grouped around him and drew their own guns.

"Okay, kids," the guard said heavily. "Drop 'em."

Larry fired at the guard and missed. The guard raised his gun again.

The three boys ran for the door. Another shot from the guard's gun followed them. At the entrance, Al and Jack turned and fired wildly into the bank. Then all three were taking wild shots.

The shooting and noise brought the police immediately, though, and they came up behind the boys

before more than a few minutes had passed. Once finally surrounded, the boys surrendered.

It was discovered right after that that, in those final minutes of fighting, the boys had killed one of the bank's customers, a sixty-three-year-old man named Toby Wills.

Manslaughter was added to the indictment.

When the case came to trial, the boys, through their lawyer, protested violently. "It's impossible to tell who fired the shot," they said. "Without knowing who killed the old guy, how can you charge all of us with manslaughter? Only one bullet killed him; there wasn't any more than one bullet in his body. Unless you can tell who fired the shot, you can't hold us for manslaughter — only attempted robbery."

The prosecuting attorney pointed

out that Toby Wills was dead. Someone had killed him and someone would have to pay.

"Sure," Larry said. "Find out who killed him. We didn't all do it — only one of us. We were all firing, but only one bullet killed the old guy."

"You were all firing," the prosecuting attorney said. "Therefore, you're all equally guilty."

"Two of us missed," Larry said. "You can't hold us all for the same crime."

Who was right?

"What's *your* verdict?"

ANSWER:

The prosecuting attorney was right. Since all were equally guilty of the crime, and since the killing was committed as a direct result of the crime, all three boys could be tried for manslaughter — and all three were convicted.



I just sat there and listened to the old man. I'd tried to kill him, so I guess I deserved a lecture or something.

The Trap

BY ROBERT TURNER

I KNEW we were in for trouble, right off. This gas station job wasn't going to slide smooth like the other two. The old guy didn't act right when he saw the gun. He hardly looked at it. He didn't seem to hear me when I said: "Okay, doc. Do as we tell you. Spring that register and stand back against the wall, holding the back of your neck."

He had a kind of sad, half smile around his lips. He was maybe sixty, beefy, white-haired; a nice-looking old guy, kind of the fatherly type, like Guy Kibbee.

When he didn't do like he was told, right off, I stepped in and slammed him with the barrel of the .32, not hard enough to kayo him, just enough to hurt, knock him off balance and let him see maybe Tracy and I were just kids but we weren't fooling. You have to do that. You can't waste time on these things, let them stall you. Seconds might make the difference between a clean slide and getting clobbered.



He should have done like I told him, then, fast, but he didn't. He put his hand to the swelling cut on his cheek and the sad smile-like expression never left his face. He still didn't say anything. He was giving me the whammies. I started for him again when he said:

"You don't have to hit me any

more, son. You're tough, all right. You mean business. You the kids who held up those two other places on the west side, the last two nights? I read about it in the papers."

All this conversation. I should have hit him again but I somehow couldn't. I shoved him back against the wall hard enough to rattle his store teeth. I said: "Tracy, get that register open. Get the cash. We're taking too long. We got to get out of here." My voice broke, sounded scared and I didn't say anything else.

The cash register clanged open and my eyes shifted toward it, involuntarily, to see how full it was. There were some bills but I couldn't tell how many. Then he was on me. The old guy. He came pushing off that wall like a bounced ball. He smacked my gun arm down and in reflex action I pulled the trigger. The sound of the shot, sharp and echoing, scared me. It happened so fast I don't know how he did it, but he spun me around, got one arm up behind my back, twisting it.

I'm big for a kid and bull-strong but he had the leverage and the pain in my arm was too much. I dropped the gun. Tracy stooped to scoop it up and the old guy kicked him in the face. Tracy sobbed and swore and wheeled and ran from the place. I was spun again and something came at my face. It was the old guy's fist but I didn't know it in time. I didn't know anything, then . . .

I came to with the overhead light of the filling station blinding me. I

couldn't remember things right off. Then I sat up and saw the old guy, with the .32 in his hand. He was sitting on the counter, blood caked on the cut in his cheek. He was still holding that kind of soft smile. I'd been taken in by that, good. He'd played me for a sucker, this old guy. He only *looked* soft. I should have cold-decked him with the gun right off, got him out of the way. Next time I'd know better. Next time . . . I got sick in the stomach, realizing there wouldn't be any next time. We were waiting for the cops. In a while I'd be in the coop. I had to stop thinking about that.

"Suppose you think you're a pretty tough old geek?" I sneered.

He shook his head, still smiling. "No," he said. "You weren't hard to take. Any of the guys in my outfit could have done the same. You don't forget things like that even when you were taught them back in the first war."

I tried not to think about the cops coming. I had a few minutes yet, probably. There had to be some way out of this. I tried an angle. I looked sheepish and dumb as I could. "Okay, Pop," I said. "You win. You've still got your money. You showed us what jerky kids we were. Now give me a break. Let me scam. What have you got to lose? I won't ever try this again, believe me! I'm cured."

The smile deepened the lines around his big mouth. He said, gently: "I'd like to do that, son."

God knows, I'd like to. How old are you, anyway?" I told him. He shook his head, slowly. "Harry was seventeen, too, when he died. Harry was my kid. My only kid. My only everything. His mother died when he was born."

I snatched at this. I told him: "There you are. Would you want your son turned in, sent to jail? Give me a break for his sake. Listen, you let Tracy get away. Why pick on me?"

"The police will get Tracy, too," he said. "I'll give them his name now I know it. He probably lives in your neighborhood. He won't be hard to find — or break."

I shut my teeth together hard. I shouldn't have mentioned Tracy's name. It was like ratting on him. Then I thought: So what? He could have helped me but he ran out. He ratted on me for real.

"Son," the old guy said. "When I read about you fellows in the paper last night and the night before, I prayed you'd come here next, that I'd get this chance. Maybe there's something to this praying business." He sighed. "Let me tell you about my Harry. Him not having any mother, just the two of us — you know — I guess I spoiled him. He was a wise kid like you, only I didn't realize it. What he needed was what I just gave you — a good sock in the jaw. He thought he was a little tin god who could get away with anything. I'd made him think that way. When I couldn't give him all the

money he thought he needed, he decided to get it anyhow. He got away with four stickups. On the fifth one he got shot. He — he died in the hospital before I could even get to talk to him."

I didn't say anything. I just looked at him. My heart went faster. I figured this was a break. The old guy's own son killed in a heist. He's going to give me a lecture, a scare, and then check me out of here. I loosened up. I began to feel good.

"This was going to be the last one for Tracy and me," I said. "We weren't going to pull any more. We aren't really crooks, mister. Neither of us liked to do this but we needed money bad and there was no other way —"

"That's just what my Harry said," the old guy cut in, "when I found out what he was up to, after the third stickup he and his buddy pulled. When I was going to beat the hell out of him, even threatened to turn him into the police. But he looked at me — like you're looking at me now, so damn young and full of big-eyed innocence. And the way he pleaded . . . So I let him off with a lecture and his promise that he wouldn't do it again, that he was through. I didn't know then that when people get away with things, they keep right on doing them. Why shouldn't they? . . . I guess I didn't want to know."

Sweat started to bathe me. I got itchy, nervous, and my stomach was pitching. He had to stop all this guff,

soon, and turn me out of here or it would be too late. I was only half listening when he said:

"You're going to jail, son, but you're still alive. Nobody shot you. And *you* didn't have to shoot anybody. There's no murder rap."

It was like a balloon busting inside my head. I couldn't believe what he was getting at. And then headlights splashed into the service station and two cars stopped outside. I sat there numbly and watched the cops walk in. I listened to the old guy tell them what had happened and felt

them take my arms and tell me I was going with them. I tried to figure it and couldn't. What was the matter with the old guy, was he crazy? All that sob stuff about his kid, Harry, making me think he was going to give me a break. What kind of a lousy trick was that?

Then, as we went out the door, I looked back and the old guy had his face in his hands and he looked like he was crying, his shoulders shaking and all. But I must've been mistaken. Why would he be bawling, a cold, hard-hearted old rat like him?



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David R. Saunders, this month's Expert in Crime, is an acknowledged authority on confidence games. He describes one of the most popular in this article.

Experts In Crime

CONFIDENCE GAMES

BY DAVID R. SAUNDERS

HARRY was all set for his final pitch. He took the envelope from his inside pocket, held it in his hand for a moment, and looked quickly around the small restaurant. Then he handed it to the well-dressed man sitting opposite him in the booth.

"Here it is, Mr. Johnson," Harry said, his voice pitched low so that no one else could possibly hear him. "I could get a lot more for this if I waited a while, you know."

Johnson smiled. "You mean that once the stock gets listed, you'd be able to sell it on the regular market, don't you?"

Harry shrugged his shoulders. If Johnson wanted to think it was only a matter of time before the mining stock certificates in the envelope were listed on the market, and that he was getting them cheaper now because they were unlisted, that was business — and it was exactly what Harry wanted him to think.

Johnson took the stock certificates

out of the envelope, glanced at them for a moment, and then began to chuckle. His face broke into a broad grin, and then, as though unable to control himself, he laughed out loud.

Harry stared at him, not knowing what to make of Johnson's reaction, and then he looked nervously around the restaurant. People were beginning to glance at them as Johnson's loud laughter echoed through the small room. Finally, Johnson quieted down. He chuckled again a couple of times and then handed the envelope and the certificates back to Harry.

"You made a good try," Johnson said. "I was waiting to see how you'd carry it off."

"I don't know what you mean," Harry said, the chilling thought beginning to dawn on him that Johnson was wise to him.

"Oh, come off it," Johnson said heartily. "The fake mining stock game is one of the oldest in the con business. I used it myself once — but it takes a man of experience to handle it right nowadays."

Harry stared at him in amazement, his mouth open.

Johnson laughed softly, and said, "That's right. We're in the same game. Only difference is that you're still a bit too green. Can't even keep a straight face and bluff it out when you're caught."

Harry closed his mouth abruptly, and then the humor of the situation hit him, and he began to laugh along with Johnson.

"I haven't been at it long," he admitted, "but I'm sure learning fast today."

"You got a way to go yet," Johnson told him. "You'll make it, though, once you learn the ropes. Better start a bit lower than mining stocks, then work your way up to them and to the bigger money."

Harry nodded soberly. "Guess you're right. Got any tips for me — or is it all a professional secret?"

Johnson smiled. "I'll only be in town tonight, but stick around till after we eat, and I'll show you a few things."

Harry nodded happily, and Johnson called the waitress over and they ordered their meal. While they were eating, Johnson talked steadily. He told Harry how to dress, how to act, how to approach a sucker, how to make his pitch — and Harry got a liberal education in the finer points of the con game along with his steak dinner, for which Johnson magnanimously paid.

On the way out of the restaurant, Johnson stopped at a phone booth to call a couple of "prospects," as he called them. Then they walked out.

"Here's what we'll do," Johnson said, as they strolled along the busy main thoroughfare. "I have to catch a train at midnight, but I'll help you pull one job here tonight — if we can find a sucker. Just follow my lead, and you'll learn something."

"That's fine with me," Harry said, and they kept on walking until Johnson suddenly nudged him in the ribs and said, "There's one."

Johnson motioned with his head to an elderly man apparently strolling along the street out to see the sights.

"How can you tell?" Harry asked.

"Look at the way he's dressed," Johnson said. "A tourist. Got some money, too, from the looks of him. Let's see if we can pull one of the simpler cons on him."

Johnson walked over to the man, with Harry following along, and Harry remained silent and watched while Johnson stopped the stranger, asked directions to some place in the city, then acted surprised when the stranger told him he didn't know.

It seemed a matter of only a few moments before the stranger had introduced himself as Mr. Thomas and had been cleverly led by Johnson to join them — since they were all strangers in town. In fact, Johnson had worked it so that the suggestion for the three of them to make a night of it together had come from the stranger himself.

Johnson was in complete control of the situation. Very adroitly, he led Thomas and Harry into a store

to buy some cigarettes, had suggested that they match coins to see who paid. Thomas, of course, won the match — and before long, Harry found himself joining them in a tavern while they matched for drinks. Needless to say, the stranger won the toss most of the time.

When Thomas finally excused himself to go to the men's room, Johnson leaned over to Harry and said, "Now we'll take him."

"How?" Harry asked.

Johnson flipped a coin up into the air. "Heads," he said. It came out heads. He did this several times, each time calling heads or tails — and the coin came up just as he called it. "It's specially weighted," he told Harry. "I don't pull this game any more. It's too amateurish, but it'll give you a chance to see how it works."

Thomas joined them again, and once more Johnson took charge. Before they had finished two more drinks, Thomas had heartily agreed to match for five-dollar bills, and the coin tossing began in earnest. Harry played along with them and watched at how Johnson let Thomas win for a while and then started him on a losing streak. Johnson kept winning toss after toss, allowing Harry or Thomas to win one here and there just to make things look good.

Suddenly, Thomas slammed his palm down on the table and looked suspiciously at Johnson and Harry.

Johnson gave him a puzzled look. "What's wrong?"

"I think I'm being taken."

"Well, I've lost \$200 myself," Harry said, and he felt a glow of pride at the approval he saw in Johnson's eyes. Harry was catching on now.

Thomas snorted. "So what! You two are in cahoots."

Harry tried to still the panic that was rising in him, but Johnson's calm, quiet manner dominated the whole situation.

"Look," he said to Thomas, "let's not get hasty about this. Let's you and I talk this over — alone." He gave a warning glance at Harry and got up from the table.

"Okay," Thomas said, "but you'd better make it good." He started to walk to the back of the tavern.

Johnson leaned over to Harry and whispered quickly. "Get out of here and wait for me on the corner. I'll handle this guy."

Harry wasted no time getting out of the tavern — but he wasted a lot of time waiting on the corner before he realized that he was the one who had been taken, not Thomas. Thomas, of course, had been the "prospect" that Johnson phoned from the restaurant, and the two of them, both experienced con men, had given Harry a lesson in the tricks of the trade he was trying to learn. Harry learned, of course — to the tune of \$200.



The



Man Between

The police didn't have much to go on. It seemed as if everybody liked the dead man.

A Police Files Novel

BY JONATHAN CRAIG

THE phone in the squad room had been ringing almost constantly ever since my partner, Walt Logan, and I had come on duty at eight A.M., and now it was ringing again. I put my cardboard container of coffee down with one hand and reached for the phone with the other.

"Twentieth Squad," I said. "Detective Manning."

It was a woman, apparently a very young one. "I want to report a murder," she said.

I reached for a pencil. "Where?"

"Eight-fourteen West Sixty-fifth Street."

"What kind of building is that?"

"It's a private residence," Her voice was clear and steady, but very taut.

"And your name, miss?"

"Frances Cole. I . . . I just got here."

"Are you the one who found the body?"

"Yes."

"All right, Miss Cole. We'll be right over. Don't touch anything, and see that no one else does." I hung up and glanced at Walt Logan. "Good thing we're caught up around here," I said.

Walt looked up from his typewriter. He's one of these very tall, very thin guys with crew-cut dark hair and a pleasant, scholarly face that would fit a high-school math teacher a lot better than it does a cop. There were hoods around New York who had thought he'd be an easy man to take—until they'd tried it. "What've we got now, Steve?" he asked.

"A body. The woman who called in the squeal says it's a homicide."

Walt sighed softly. "Let's hope she's wrong. I still haven't made up the sleep I lost on the last one."

I dialed Headquarters and told the officer in the Trouble Turret about the squeal. He, in turn, would dispatch an ambulance and a tech crew, and notify the Medical Examiner's Office.

After I finished my report to the Trouble Turret and stepped into the squad commander's office to tell him where we'd be, Walt and I rounded up three patrolmen and went down stairs to check out an RMP card.

2.

The house at 814 West 65th Street was a four-story brownstone, one in a row of about a dozen identical brownstones. The girl who opened

the front door for us was about eighteen, a small girl with short, glossy black hair and tilted brown eyes. She was extremely pretty and, apparently, in complete control of herself.

"I'm Miss Cole," she said as she stood back to let us pass inside. "I'm the one who called."

I gestured toward my partner. "This is Detective Logan, Miss Cole. My name's Manning."

I posted one of the patrolmen at the front door, and then Miss Cole led us along the hallway to what, in New York brownstones, is known as the back parlor.

The dead man sat slumped at one end of a sofa, his head sagging far to one side, his feet spread wide apart and extended before him so that only the heels of his shoes touched the carpet. He was, I judged, about thirty, a very big man with thick red hair and a florid, freckled face. His features were heavy, but even. He was dressed in an expensive-looking dark blue suit, white shirt, and maroon necktie. There was a small bullet hole in the back of his neck, about an inch above his collar. There was no exit wound, and almost no blood at all.

I bent down and studied the bullet hole for a moment. It was a contact wound, and the imprint of a muzzle and front sight meant that an automatic pistol had been used. Such imprints are produced by recoil, and cannot, of course, be left by revolvers. I called Walt's attention to it.

"Probably a small caliber," he said. "Couldn't have been much more than a .22, or there'd be an exit wound."

I turned to the girl. She was still standing near the door, obviously trying not to look in our direction. She was wearing a skin-tight silk-jersey dress with nothing, or next to nothing, under it. I decided she might be a little older than I'd thought.

"Do you know who did this, Miss Cole?" I asked.

Her tilted eyes came up to meet mine for an instant, then wandered away again. "No," she said, so softly I had trouble hearing her.

"What's his name?"

"Robert Dykeman."

"And what was your relationship with him, Miss Cole?"

"I — was his secretary."

"Anyone else home now?"

"No. He lived alone."

"No family?"

"Mr. Dykeman and his wife were separated."

"When did you find him?"

Her eyes started up again, but they didn't quite make it. "Just a minute or so before I called you," she said.

I nodded toward the patrolmen. "Better search the house, boys. One of you can start on the top floor and the other in the basement. I don't think you're going to find any one but, if you do, don't take any chances. Get your guns out now, and keep them out."

"Want me to call the lieutenant and tell him what we've got?" Walt asked.

"Yeah, and watch how you handle the phone; there might be prints. If the lieutenant asks whether we want any more men, tell him no. Not just now, anyhow. And after you call him, see if you can find the cartridge that went with that bullet."

Walt lifted the phone from the table at the end of the sofa, and I crossed over to Miss Cole.

"This isn't the place to talk," I said. "Maybe we'd better find another room."

She nodded absently and turned toward the door. "We can go in the office." I followed her across the hall to a small room outfitted with a green metal desk, two green filing cabinets, and an old Underwood typewriter on a wooden card table.

"Mr. Dykeman did a lot of his work at home," Miss Cole said as she sat down on the straight chair beside the table.

I leaned a hip against the desk, studying her. I could sense now that her apparent self-control was costing her even more effort than I'd thought at first. She sat very stiffly, feet pressed together, hands in her lap.

"I know this isn't easy for you, Miss Cole," I said. "We'll make it as brief as possible."

She moistened her lips. "I'm all right. I — I want to do everything I can."

I glanced at my watch. It was

half-past ten. "When you called me at the station house, you said you'd just got here," I said. "What was the purpose of your visit?"

"Mr. Dykeman called the office and asked me to come out."

"When was this?"

She frowned thoughtfully. "About a quarter of nine, I guess. The office opens at eight-thirty, and I'd been there about fifteen minutes."

"This a regular thing? Your coming here, I mean."

"Well, I usually came once or twice a week."

"What line of work was Mr. Dykeman in?"

"He was sales promotion manager for Cort and Anders."

"That the sporting goods outfit?"

"Yes."

"Uh-huh. Well, suppose you tell me just what happened when you got here this morning."

She looked down at her folded hands for a moment. "There isn't much to tell. When Mr. Dykeman didn't answer the bell, I came on in and —"

"You have a key to the front door, do you?"

"Yes. Sometimes Mr. Dykeman would send me here from the office, for papers and things, and so he had a key made for me."

"I see. What was the first thing you did after you let yourself in?"

"Well, I thought Mr. Dykeman was probably upstairs somewhere, so I just went into the back parlor to wait for him." She paused. "At

first I thought he'd fallen asleep, the way he was sitting there on the sofa and all. . . . When I saw what had happened, I called the police."

"Who was Mr. Dykeman's superior at the office?"

"Mr. Stevens. Mr. Max Stevens."

I wrote the name down in my notebook. "I assume you came out here to take dictation?"

"Yes."

"Where's the office located, Miss Cole?"

"On Columbus Circle. The Tyler Building."

"How long had you been Mr. Dykeman's secretary?"

"About four months."

"You know him well?"

"I was his secretary, wasn't I? Of course I knew him well."

"I meant aside from your work."

She crossed her legs and stared at me. "Why must people always think that a man and his secretary are — well, that there's something *wrong* about their relationship?"

"All this is purely routine. Did he have any enemies that you know of?"

She shook her head. "I can't imagine Mr. Dykeman having any enemies. I don't remember his ever having said a harsh word to anyone."

"You said he was separated from his wife, I believe."

"That's right."

"We'll want to notify her right away, of course. Does she live here in New York?"

"I couldn't say."

"Surely you must have heard whether or not she —"

"I told you once. I know nothing about her. Absolutely nothing."

There were voices at the front door. I recognized one of them as belonging to the chief of the tech crew.

"The laboratory technicians are here, Miss Cole," I said. "Would your mind waiting in here for me, please?"

She shrugged and turned to look out the window.

3.

The tech crew and the ambulance had arrived at the same time. I asked the ambulance attendants to wait outside, and then I took the tech crew along the hall toward the back parlor. In addition to the chief, Eddie Sheaffer, there was a fingerprint man and a photographer. All were police officers.

Walt Logan was on his hands and knees beside the sofa, searching between the cushions. He nodded to Eddie and the others, and then got up, shaking his head. "No sign of that cartridge, Steve," he said. "I even looked in the cuffs of Dykeman's pants."

"Well, at least we know the killer probably wasn't a pro," I said. "No self-respecting pro would have used an automatic in the first place. Especially one that little."

Walt and I helped the techs un-

pack their equipment, and a few moments later the assistant M.E. came in. He nodded to us and walked directly to the body. "Contact wound," he said. "Well, this shouldn't take long. It's the butchered ones that take time."

I turned to Walt. "Let's see if we can find that gun," I said.

"Too bad Miss Cole doesn't have a handbag," Walt said. "Then we could look in there."

I grinned. "It comes easy sometimes," I said. "But not that easy."

We met the two patrolmen just outside the door.

"Any luck?" I asked.

They shook their heads.

"Walt and I are going to take a look for the gun," I told them. "You boys might as well stand by in here. Maybe you can give the doc or the techs a hand."

4.

Walt and I stayed together throughout the search. We didn't find anything. When we got back to the parlor, the assistant M.E. had finished his preliminary investigation of the body and was filling out his report.

"How long has he been dead, Bill?" I asked.

"Not very long, Steve. About three hours." He glanced at his watch. "It's a couple of minutes till twelve, so that would make it about nine o'clock."

"How much time does that 'about'

take in, Bill?" Walt queried him.

"Well, I can't tell you to the minute, of course. Nobody could. There's a possibility that it might have been as much as twenty or thirty minutes either way."

"Any chance of the autopsy narrowing it down a little?"

"Not in this case. No, I'm afraid you'll have to work within those limits. Figure on nine o'clock, but don't try to sue me if you find out it happened as early as eight-thirty, or as late as nine-thirty."

I looked toward the tech chief. "You through with the body, Eddie?"

"All through, Steve."

"We'll get him over to your shop right away, doc," I said. "Walt and I couldn't search him till after you were finished, of course, but that won't take long."

"Fine." He nodded a good-by to the others and left the room.

There was nothing in Dykeman's pockets of interest to Walt and me. Just the usual comb, handkerchief, keys, and billfold. The billfold contained half a dozen business cards, a driver's permit, and twenty-eight dollars. Robbery, apparently, had not been the motive.

I sealed the billfold and other items in an envelope and put the envelope in my pocket.

"What now?" Walt asked.

"I'm going to have another session with Miss Cole," I said. "What I'd like for you to do is check with the neighbors and the people across

the street. See what you can find out about Mr. Dykeman, and see if anyone noticed anything unusual this morning. Any strange men or women coming in and out. Like that! Check back with me every half-hour or so."

After Walt left I walked over to the tech chief. "How're you making out, Eddie?" I asked.

"Not so good," he said. "We got a couple of partials off the phone, and that's all."

"How about the finger span?"

"Hard to tell, on a phone. I'd guess they were a woman's, but I couldn't swear to it."

"Nothing else at all?"

"Well, there's a little burnt powder on the back of the sofa, just behind the guy's head."

"Which means Dykeman was shot just where he sat," I said. "It helps to know he wasn't shot somewhere else, and then propped up in here like this."

I asked one of the patrolmen to call the ambulance attendants. After they'd signed a receipt for the body and taken it away, I stepped across the hall to talk to Frances Cole again.

5.

She was standing at the window, her shoulders slumped, sobbing into a handkerchief. But when she heard the door open she whirled toward me, her dark eyes angry and immense.

"I thought you were coming right back," she said tightly.

"I'm sorry, Miss Cole. I —"

"I can imagine how sorry you are. This is just exactly the kind of treatment I always knew I could expect from the police." She'd been angry before, but now she was furious, as if her anger had been building steadily from the moment I'd left her alone.

I sat down at the desk and put my feet up on a wastebasket. "We were talking about Mr. Dykeman's wife," I said. "You told me you knew nothing about her. Now, how about children?"

She glared at me and said nothing.

"I'm just trying to do a job, Miss Cole," I said. "I'd appreciate a little coöperation."

"You should show a little consideration for others, then. . . . No, there are no children."

"You ever hear of Mr. Dykeman having any involvements with women — especially married women?"

"No."

"At the time you called us, did it occur to you that Mr. Dykeman's killer might still be here in the house?"

"Of course it did. I simply locked the parlor door and kept it locked until you rang the bell."

"Was it the usual thing for you to go straight to the back parlor, when you let yourself in? Why didn't you come here to the office?"

She turned to face the window again. "It wasn't the *usual* thing, no.

Mr. Dykeman almost always let me in. I don't know why I went to the back parlor rather than here. I just did, that's all."

"Is there anything that comes to your mind that might help us solve this, Miss Cole? I mean by that, have you ever seen or overheard anything that might give us a lead?"

She shook her head. "No."

I got to my feet and took a step toward her. "I'm sorry if my questions have upset you," I said. "Homicide investigations are never very pleasant for anyone, including the detectives on the case."

She whirled toward me. "Are you *quite* through now?"

"All through, Miss Cole."

"May I leave?"

"Yes." I took out my notebook and pencil. "What's your home address?"

"Ten-eighteen West Fiftieth. Apartment twelve."

I wrote it down. "We might want to get in touch with you again," I said. "If we do, I'll —"

"If you do, I hope I can talk to some other detective." She strode past me, jerked the door open, and slammed it after her as hard as she could.

I stared at the door for a moment, and then I turned back to the desk and began going through the drawers. Walt and I had given it a quick look while we were searching for the gun, but we hadn't stopped to examine any of the letters or papers.

When Walt Logan came in, twenty

minutes later, I was just finishing up.

"Find anything?" Walt asked.

"Not a thing. I was hoping there might be some horse sheets, or past-due bills, or maybe a threatening letter from somebody's husband."

"I drew a blank, too," Walt said. "I talked with the people around here, like you said. None of them even knew Dykeman's name. It's just like it usually is in New York, Steve. Nobody knows his own neighbors." He glanced about the office. "What happened to your girl friend?"

"I let her go home. She either couldn't help, or she wouldn't help. All she did was take up space and give me a hard time." I moved toward the door. "Mr. Dykeman worked for Cort and Anders, in the Tyler Building. That's where I'll be for the next hour or so, in case you want to get in touch with me. Ask for Mr. Max Stevens' office. Stevens was Dykeman's boss."

"Any special instructions?"

"Maybe you'd better call the D.A.'s office. I've been putting it off, hoping we'd come up with a little more to go on. Just tell the assistant D.A. in charge what we've got. If he wants to come out, or send someone out, okay. But don't suggest it. It'd be a waste of time. All we've got so far is a body."

6.

For a sporting goods outfit, Cort and Anders seemed to employ an unusual number of women. All of

them were young, most of them were pretty, and none of them struck me as being noticeably athletic. I identified myself to the receptionist, asked to see Mr. Stevens, and was shown into his office immediately.

Stevens rose from his desk, took an unlighted cigar from his mouth long enough to say, "Come in, Manning," and then sat down again. He was in his middle forties, a hawk-faced, completely bald man with brooding, deep-set eyes. He weighed about two-twenty, I guessed, and almost none of it seemed to be fat. I waited a moment for him to ask me to sit down, and when he didn't, I crossed to his desk, pulled a straight chair close to it, and sat down anyway.

Stevens shifted the cigar to the other side of his mouth and frowned at me. "My girl tells me you're a detective, Manning. What's your problem?"

"I'd like to ask you a few questions about Mr. Dykeman," I said.

"About Dyke?" His frown deepened. "Is he in some kind of trouble?"

"He's dead."

Stevens bit down a little harder on the cigar, but otherwise his expression didn't change at all.

"He was killed," I said. "Murdered."

Stevens worked on the cigar for a while, staring at me unblinkingly. "Who killed him?"

"We don't know that yet."

"I see."

"You take this pretty calmly, Mr. Stevens," I said.

Stevens' eyes narrowed a little. "What do you want? A show of grief? I'm an executive, not an actor. I'm concerned, naturally — but only because Dykeman was such a hell of a good man on his job. As a person, he wasn't any more to me than you are."

I studied him for a moment, then reached for my notebook and pencil. "Just what was his job here?"

Stevens spoke quickly, slurring the words around his cigar. "He planned our newspaper and magazine advertising and worked out our direct mail campaigns. Things like that. He also planned promotions for our branch offices."

"Do you know whether he was in trouble of any kind?"

"Does that include wife trouble?"

"Yes."

"Well, then Dyke had his share of it. His wife's a lush. A bad one. She was in the office not too long ago, all juiced up. It got pretty ripe. I told Dyke to keep her out of here."

"What happened?"

"She made a scene. Embarrassed hell out of a couple of our out-of-town customers who happened to be on deck at the time. It seems Dyke was a little behind with the support money he was supposed to pay her. She charged right in the office and demanded her money then and there."

"Do you know where Mrs. Dykeman's staying?"

"Dyke said she was at the Bonner-ton Hotel."

I wrote it down. "Now, about Frances Cole," I said. "Did you know she'd gone out to Mr. Dykeman's home this morning?"

"No. But then I wouldn't, you see. She went out there quite often. There'd be no point in her telling me about it."

"You say often. How often?"

He shrugged. "A couple of times a week. Sometimes more."

"Was there anything between them, do you think?"

"There might have been. He'd get that look on his face — if you know what I mean. That's just an impression, mind you."

"I understand. Do you happen to know why he and his wife separated?"

Stevens placed both hands on the desk and drummed softly with his fingertips. "All I can give you is a guess. From the occasional fragment of office gossip I overheard, I'd say it was because of Dyke's interest in other women."

I noticed that a subtle change had come into his voice, but I couldn't quite identify it. "Any particular woman?" I asked.

He looked away from me for the first time, and then for only an instant. "Not so far as I know," he said.

"Is Mrs. Dykeman attractive?"

"Extremely."

"When did they separate?"

"About four months ago."

I thought back to my conversa-

tion with Frances Cole. "That would be about the time Miss Cole became his secretary, wouldn't it?"

"That's right."

"Miss Cole told me she received a call from him this morning. Where would she have taken such a call, Mr. Stevens?"

"She and Dyke and Jerry Noland shared the same office. I presume she would have taken it there."

"I wonder if I might talk to Mr. Noland?"

"Perhaps it would have been better if you'd talked to him to begin with."

"Why so?"

"Because he's known Dyke all his life. Obviously he's the man to talk to." He stood up and crossed to a door at the far side of the room. "I'll get him."

I waited till Stevens closed the door behind him, and then I lifted the phone and dialed Dykeman's phone number.

Walt Logan answered.

"Any developments?" I asked.

"Nothing that'll solve the case for us," he said. "I called the D.A.'s office. They sent out an assistant D.A. and a couple of detectives."

"They still there?"

"No. They prowled around a while and then went back downtown."

"The tech men still there?"

"They just finished up."

"Uh-huh. Well, I've got Mrs. Dykeman's address now. I think you'd better notify her right away."

"Just notify her? No questions?"

"Not just yet. I want to be there when we interrogate her. She lives at the Bonnerton Hotel. That's on East Fiftieth, just off Lexington."

"Anything else?"

"Not unless she volunteers some information. If she gives you any leads, go ahead and start checking them out. But otherwise, you might as well go on back to the station house."

7.

Mr. Stevens returned a few moments later, followed by a tall young man with thinning blond hair, a long, heavy-featured face, and a chin like a clenched fist.

"This is Mr. Noland," Stevens said. "Jerry, this is Detective Manning." As Noland and I shook hands, Stevens said, "I took the liberty of telling Jerry what has happened."

I nodded. "Mr. Noland, I wonder if you'd mind answering a few questions for me?"

Stevens said, "Maybe you'd rather talk in your own office, Jerry." It wasn't a suggestion, it was an order.

Noland turned his head slowly and looked at Stevens with as much naked contempt as I'd ever seen on a man's face. "We'll do that, Mr. Stevens," he said in that taut voice. "We'll do that very thing."

Stevens nodded absently, glanced at his watch, and walked to his desk.

"This way, Mr. Manning," Noland said and led me through the

door by which he and Stevens had just entered. I followed him through a large display room, filled with every imaginable kind of sports equipment, from Italian motor scooters down to small arms and hunting knives in verticle glass cases.

"I understand Mr. Dykeman was a very close friend of yours," I said.

"He was. He was the only real friend I ever had."

I followed him through another door into a small but completely equipped bar-room. Noland went behind the bar, poured two small high-ball glasses entirely full of whisky, handed me one of them, and drained the other without taking a breath.

"The son of a bitch," Noland said. "Do you know how he broke the news to me? He *congratulated* me. He came into my office and slapped me on the back and said, 'Congratulations, boy! You're the new sales promotion manager!' And then the bastard tells me what happened to Dyke. . . . I felt like kicking him right out the window."

There didn't seem to be much to say to that. I took a sip of the whisky. "I'm trying to get some idea of the kind of man Mr. Dykeman was," I said. "Mr. Stevens said you'd known him all your life."

"That's right. We went to school together, all the way from grade school through City College. I came with Cort and Anders right after graduation, but Dyke did four years in the army. He always spent his leaves in New York, though, so we

still kept in touch." Some of the tautness had left his voice now. "I'll give you an example of the kind of personality Dyke had. When he got out of the army he came up here to see me about getting located somewhere. He thought I might know of a sales connection somewhere. Anyhow, Mr. Stevens happened to walk through my office while Dyke and I were talking. I introduced them, and five minutes later Dyke was working for Cort and Anders, too. Stevens is a bastard, but he knows a good man when he sees one."

"He told me he was a good man on the job," I said, "but he didn't seem to think too much of him as a person."

Noland made a derisive sound deep in his throat. "That's because of Mrs. Stevens. Hell, he hated Dyke, Mr. Manning."

"Why?"

"Because of something that happened at our sales convention — this was about six weeks ago — Mrs. Stevens made a terrific play for Dyke, right in front of her husband and about fifty other people. It embarrassed Dyke, and he and I got out of there as soon as we could. Stevens is one of the biggest wheels in the company, and so everybody pretended it hadn't happened."

"I see."

"There's no love lost between Stevens and *me*, either."

"I sort of gathered that."

"But I'll say one thing for him. He never takes out his feelings on

you, if you deliver. As long as you help him boot his sales record up every year, you can kick him in the stomach every morning and twice again at night."

Two men came through the entrance and moved toward the bar.

"One of our salesmen and a customer," Noland said. "We'd better go over to a booth." He picked up our drinks and led me to a curved booth at the far corner of the room.

When we were seated, I said, "Knowing Mr. Dykeman as well as you did, can you think of anyone who might like to see him dead?"

"No. God, no. Dyke never made an enemy in his life."

"You know the reason for his and Mrs. Dykeman's separation?"

"I can tell you in one word. Work. Dyke used to put in a twelve-hour day here, and then go home and work half the night."

"We're notifying Mrs. Dykeman of his death, of course. Are there any other close relatives we should call?"

"No. There was just his wife and . . . and me."

"Do you know Mrs. Dykeman pretty well?"

He nodded. "Very well. I introduced her to Dyke, as a matter of fact." He paused, glancing at me sharply. "If you're wondering whether *she* could have done it, the answer is no. Never in a million years."

I let it go. "I understand you and Mr. Dykeman shared the same office with Miss Cole."

"That's right."

"Miss Cole strike you as being a reasonably level-headed girl?"

"Why, yes. . . . Why?"

"You like her, personally?"

"Very much. She's helped me over some pretty rough spots since she's been here."

"How about Mr. Dykeman — did he and Miss Cole hit it off together?"

"They got along fine."

"How about insurance?"

"There was a twenty-thousand-dollar policy on his life."

"With Mrs. Dykeman as beneficiary?"

"Yes."

I folded my notebook over my finger and sat watching him for a moment. The whiskey didn't seem to have affected him at all. "I guess that just about does it," I said. "And try to buck up a little. I know that's easy to say, but —"

"Yeah. Just buck up a little. Forget all about it, the man says. Just pretend it never happened."

"He seems to have led a fairly quiet life," I said.

"He did."

"Still, he must have had quite a few friends. Can you tell whether —"

"Wait a minute" Noland said. "I just remembered something. Dyke *was* having a little trouble with someone. Nothing really serious, I guess, but . . ." He broke off, his forehead wrinkled with thought. "No, there's nothing there. I guess I must be pretty well shot to even think of it."

"Better tell me."

He shrugged. "Well, it wasn't actually trouble, you understand. It's just that Dyke had loaned a friend of his some money, and the guy didn't seem too anxious to pay it back. Dyke mentioned it to me a time or so. He didn't seem to be worried about the money so much as he was about the guy's attitude."

"Do you know how much the loan was for?"

"Two thousand dollars."

"That's certainly not peanuts. Who was the friend?"

"A man named Charlie Emmert."

"You know him?"

"Sure. He used to work here. Emmert and I never got along too well, but he and Dyke did. Dyke got along with everybody."

"Where is Emmert now?"

"Damned if I know. He had an argument with Stevens, and Stevens fired him."

"Did Mr. Dykeman tell you why Emmert had refused to pay him back?" I asked.

"He didn't say he'd actually *refused*. But he did say he'd found out that Emmert lied to him about having property in Maine. Emmert didn't have any property there, or anywhere else. I think that's what hurt Dyke as much as anything — Emmert's lying that way."

"What kind of man is Mr. Emmert?"

"He had too quick a temper. And he was pretty rugged physically, so when he lost his head there was usu-

ally a lot of fireworks. As I said, I never cared much for the guy. He . . .” Noland broke off suddenly and stared at me, his eyes narrowing a little. “I’m beginning to see what you’re driving at. Do you really think that Charlie Emmert—”

“I don’t think much of anything right now,” I said.

“My God! And it never even occurred to me until just a second ago!”

“No point in jumping to conclusions, Mr. Noland,” I said.

“Hell, I’m *not* jumping to conclusions! I just remembered something.”

“Oh?”

“Dyke said that the last time he saw Emmert he mentioned the loan. Just in an offhand way. You know what I mean. And Emmert blew up. He said Dyke had to quit hounding him. Dyke said the guy was mad as hell.”

“Did Emmert threaten him?”

“No. That is, not exactly. Dyke said he crowded him a little, but —”

“What do you mean, crowded him?”

“Well, Emmert had a way of balling up his fists and sort of leaning against you. I’ve seen him do it several times. He even did it to me once. It’s kind of hard to explain. You might be standing across the room and see him do it with someone, and you’d never know what he was up to. He’d keep smiling in a man’s face, see, but he’d have those fists balled up and his arms hanging straight down, and then he’d start

leaning against you, sort of as if he wanted to push you away from him with his chest.”

“And that’s what he did when Mr. Dykeman mentioned the loan?”

“Yes. Dyke was a pretty big man himself, but Emmert’s even bigger. And besides, Dyke never mixed it with anyone unless he absolutely had to. I mean, unless somebody actually slugged him, or something like that.”

“I suppose the receptionist will still have Emmert’s address,” I said.

“I think so.”

I slipped my notebook into my pocket and got to my feet. “We’ll check it out,” I said. “Many thanks, Mr. Noland.”

“Will you let me know as soon as you get him?”

“I’ll make a point of it,” I said over my shoulder.

On my way past the receptionist’s desk, I stopped long enough to get Emmert’s address and phone number, and then walked out to the RMP car and headed for the station house.

8.

The squad room was empty when I got there. I looked in the message book. There was a note to call Walt Logan on Lehigh 4-5598. I called the number, and got a woman’s voice.

“I’m returning Detective Logan’s call,” I said.

“Surely. Just a moment, please.”

A half-minute went by, and then Walt came on.

"I've just located Mrs. Dykeman, Steve," he said. "I think maybe you'd better talk to her yourself."

"What's the story?"

"That's just it. She hasn't got one. Oh, she's got a story all right, but it's wilder than hell. And if you think you've seen some cold ones in your time, wait till you meet her. She's cold as ice, and twice as hard."

"Where are you now, Walt?"

"Up in Harlem. I'm in a joint on 125th Street. Cappy's."

"I know where it is. Is Mrs. Dykeman there with you?"

"She's out in the ladies' room. I'm calling from the phone in the check room."

"How'd she take it when you told her about her husband?"

"She was delighted."

"Is she drunk?"

"Not now. She was pretty rocky when I first caught up with her, but the news sobered her up."

"She sounds a little psycho, Walt."

"You'd better hold your guesses. This kid is one for the book."

"Hang on to her," I said. "I've got a couple of things I have to do here, and then I'll be right up."

"Don't lose any time. She's giving me pneumonia, just listening to her."

After I'd hung up I took a Complaint Report from my desk drawer, filled it in as completely as I could from the information in my notebook, and placed the report in a file folder. Then I coded and initialed the envelope containing Dykeman's

billfold and other personal effects, placed both the envelope and the file folder in the cabinet reserved for homicide cases, and picked up the phone to call the Bureau of Criminal Identification.

The BCI was still working with the partial prints they'd lifted in Dykeman's back parlor. They had not, so far, been able to match them with any in the BCI files, nor had they matched them out with the prints the techs had taken from Dykeman himself. And while it would seem probable that they had been made by the last person to handle the telephone and other articles, such is not always the case. In this instance, that person would have been Frances Cole, when she reported the homicide, but we did not have Miss Cole's prints, and we would not be able to get them unless we came up with enough to support a charge against her. And though Walt Logan had handled the phone after Miss Cole had used it, Walt knew how to hold the instrument so that he neither left prints of his own nor smudged those already there.

I was on my way out of the squad room when the phone rang again. This time it was the morgue at Bellevue.

"This is Bill, Steve."

"Yeah, Bill. You finish the autopsy?"

"The important part of it, yes. Of course, the toxicologists are still working. We won't have a final re-

port from them for a day or so."

"You finally going to break down and call this one a homicide, Bill?"

"Absolutely. He died from a bullet in the brain, and from nothing but."

"How about the bullet?"

"A beauty. Oh, there's a bit of flattening, but not so much as you might expect. You'll have no trouble with it under a comparison microscope. This one's a ballistics man's dream."

"Was he sober at the time of death?"

"Positively."

"Is there anything else I should know?"

"There isn't anything else to know, Steve."

"Well, many thanks, Bill."

I hung up, told the lieutenant I was going up to Harlem for a talk with Mrs. Dykeman, and left the station house.

9.

Cappy's Bar, on 125th Street, was a musician's hangout. There were no booths. Instead, the large basement room was outfitted with leather sofas, each with a long cocktail table before it, arranged in such a way that all the sofas faced a circular bandstand in the center of the floor.

There was no one on the bandstand and very few customers scattered about the room when I got there. Walt Logan and a blonde woman were sitting at the rear of the room, near the service bar. When

Walt saw me, he said something to the woman, and then got up and came to meet me.

"You should have worn your overcoat, Steve," he said. "Don't say I didn't warn you."

"How'd you locate her?"

"When I found out she wasn't at her hotel, I asked the desk clerk if he had any ideas. He said she'd called an hour or so before to say she could be reached at a bar over on the east side. I went over there, but the bartender told me she'd left for here."

"Well, let's go back and give her another chance." We walked back to the blonde woman and sat down, one on either side of her.

"This is Detective Manning, Mrs. Dykeman," Walt said. "He's the officer in charge of the investigation."

She gave me one of these up-and-down looks, cool and slow, and then shrugged one shoulder slightly, as if it hadn't been worth the trouble. I might have seen a more beautiful blonde in my time, but I couldn't remember it. She had deep-yellow hair, dark green eyes, and a skin like a nine-year-old girl's.

I glanced at Walt, who gave me an I-told-you-so look, and then I said, "Mrs. Dykeman, I'm sorry that —"

"Just hold it right there," she said. She swirled the Pernod around in her glass and smiled. "Let me put you at ease, just as I did your friend here. If you want to know exactly how I feel about all this, I can tell

you in one world. Jubilant." She glanced at me and then back at her drink. "And if you feel inclined to tell me your opinion of me for feeling that way, please don't. I'm not at all interested."

"For Christ's sake," Walt said softly.

She turned to smile at him. "Do I make you uncomfortable, dear?"

I decided on a more direct approach. "Can you tell us where you were this morning?" I asked. "Say, between eight-thirty and nine-thirty?"

"I'm so awfully sorry — no."

"Why not?"

"I was in someone's apartment. You see, I'm one of these people who black out after a certain number of drinks. I have only the foggiest recollection of anything that happened between the time the bars closed this morning, and noon today. I do remember meeting this man in a bar — I think it was about three o'clock — and drinking with him till the place closed, and then going to his apartment. At least I assume it was his."

"Do you know what time you left?"

"I don't even remember leaving. I recall being awakened and told we'd have to get out, but I remember nothing that happened after that, until I suddenly snapped out of it. I was at Maureen's at the time."

"Who's Maureen?"

She looked at me sympathetically. "That isn't a person, dear. It's the

name of a cocktail lounge. It's on Broadway, just off Seventy-fourth."

"What time was this?"

"It was a few minutes past twelve."

"Who was the man you were with?"

"I wouldn't know him if he were to sit down in my lap."

"For Christ's sake," Walt said.

She glanced at him. "Really, Mr. Logan . . . Must you keep chiming in like that?"

"Well, when you sobered up a bit, weren't you curious about this man you'd spent the night with?" I asked. "Didn't you even bother to take a good look at him?"

"I suppose I was mildly curious, and yes, I think I would have taken a good look at him — but, you see, he wasn't there." She extended her glass to Walt. "Be a darling and get me a refill, will you, please?"

Walt muttered something beneath his breath, but he took the glass and carried it over to the service bar.

"Maybe you'd better take it a little easier on the sauce," I said.

She ignored that completely. "Shall we continue?"

"Can you think of anyone who might have seen the two of you together?"

"It would be greatly to my advantage if I could, wouldn't it?" She smiled apologetically, with just about the same amount of concern she might have used if she'd forgotten a phone number. "Unfortunately, I can't."

I lit cigarettes for both of us and

watched her as she dragged the smoke deep into her lungs and expelled it slowly.

"I'd like to help you," she said. "Not you, really, but myself. I anticipate no end of inconvenience."

"We'll try to keep it to a minimum," I said.

She put her hand on my forearm and squeezed gently. "You're so very kind," her voice said, and her eyes said, *You son of a bitch.*

Walt came back with her drink, handed it to her, and sat down. She sampled the smoky-looking liquid and nodded appreciatively. "I love Pernod. It's such an interesting drink."

"Do you mind telling me the reason you and Mr. Dykeman separated?" I asked.

"Not at all. I simply grew bored with him. He was — well, married to his work, you might say. I grew tired of having my life dominated by Cort and Anders. Bob was always either too tired to go out, or he wanted to stay home and think up sales gimmicks. You've no idea how unromantic sporting goods can be."

"And how about Mr. Dykeman? Did he have any outside interests?"

She laughed softly, and I could have sworn she was genuinely amused. "I'm afraid poor Bob couldn't help himself. He *was* very attractive, you know."

"Do you know Frances Cole, the girl who was his secretary?"

"Not really. I've seen her a time or so, when I was at Bob's office."

"Do you think your husband had an interest in her?"

"Oh, definitely."

"You knew that she went out to your house now and then?"

"Yes. As a matter of fact, I walked in on them once. I actually felt quite sorry for the poor girl. She isn't much more than a child, of course, and — well, I've never seen anyone blush so far down as she did." Mrs. Dykeman drew her fingertip across her waist. "All the way down to here."

"Was there a scene on that occasion?" I asked.

"A scene? Why, heavens no. Why should there be? I'd hardly be in a position to call the kettle black, as it were. And besides, I found it entertaining."

I glanced at Walt, and sure enough his lips were moving. But he didn't say anything.

I got to my feet and nodded to him. "Step up in front with me a for moment, Walt."

When we were far enough away so that we could speak without Mrs. Dykeman hearing us, I said, "A beautiful girl, Walt."

"Yeah — but who'd want her?"

"Millions of guys," I said. "But she's all yours, Walt. I'm making you a present of her."

"I was afraid of that."

"Take her to this joint on Broadway, this Maureen's. See if anybody there remembers her coming in with a man. If they do, see if you can get a line on him."

"And if they don't?"

"Then all you can do is help her work on her memory."

"You think she's leveling with that blackout business?"

"I've run into the same thing a hundred times, Walt. She's a reasonably sharp apple, and even if she weren't she could have thought up at least a dozen better alibis than the one she gave us."

"Maybe she's just got a talent for being incredible."

"That's just it," I said. "Her story's so damned incredible that she'd be ashamed to tell it."

Walt shrugged. "Maybe you're right. But you know something? If it turns out she didn't do it, I'll be a little disappointed. She's one cookie I'd like to see take a fall."

"Take good care of her," I said. "I've got a lead I want to check out." I told him about the loan Dykeman had made Emmert, and about Emmert's reaction when Dykeman had asked about it.

"You wouldn't want to trade suspects, would you?" Walt asked.

I grinned. "Check back at the station house now and then. As soon as I finish with Emmert, I'll give you a hand with her."

Walt grimaced and started back toward Mrs. Dykeman. "Sometimes I wish I was still a patrolman," he said.

10.

I spent an hour and a half trying to locate Charles Emmert, with no

luck at all. Neither the elevator operator nor the man on the switchboard at his apartment house had seen him all day. The switchboard operator told me that Emmert bowled two or three nights a week, and I checked at the two alleys in the neighborhood. Finally I went back to the apartment house, left a note at the switchboard for him to call me at the squad room, and then called the squad room myself.

The lieutenant answered.

"It's about time you called in, Steve," he said. "I was getting ready to put out an alarm for you."

"What's up, lieutenant?"

"Oh, nothing much, son. Nothing much at all. It's just that we've got the gun that killed Dykeman. The lab came up with a positive comparison almost an hour ago. No prints, though."

"Where'd you find it?"

"We didn't. A civilian found it. He was sitting in a parked car on Fiftieth, when this girl comes by. He got to watching her, like a guy will, and all at once it comes to him that she's acting funny as hell. She takes this small package out of her purse and looks all around, and then she drops it in the trash basket and takes off fast. The guy gets curious. He goes over to see what she threw away, and it's the gun. She'd wrapped it up in a piece of newspaper."

"Have you got the girl yet?"

"Sure. The guy saw her turn in at an apartment house down the street.

Then he looked up a cop. We gave the elevator operator at the apartment house a description of the girl and he identified her for us."

"What's her story?"

"She says she found the gun in her apartment when she came home from work this afternoon. She claims somebody planted it there."

I remembered that Frances Cole lived on Fiftieth Street. "What's that address on Fiftieth?" I asked.

"Ten-eighteen."

I took out my notebook and flipped through to the page on which I'd written Miss Cole's address and phone number. She lived at 1018. "Is this girl's name Frances Cole?" I asked.

"No. Her name's Lucille Gardner."

"I'll be right over," I said.

11.

Lucille Gardner was about twenty, I guessed, a tall, plain girl with very short brown hair and eyes that looked as if they'd seen a lot of trouble. I took her into the interrogation room, closed the door, and sat her down in the room's only upholstered chair. She stared at me, moistening her lips slowly. She didn't strike me as being so much frightened as perplexed. I knew she wouldn't have been told that a test bullet fired from the automatic found in her apartment had matched out against the one found in Dykeman's skull.

"You want to give me your story again, Miss Gardner?" I said.

"I can't imagine who would have done such a thing," she said. "Put the gun there, I mean."

"You ever see the gun before?"

"Never. And it wasn't in my closet yesterday, either. I had everything down off the shelf last night, you see, and I *know* it wasn't there."

"Anyone else have a key to your apartment?"

"No. I just moved in last week. Last Friday."

"Where, exactly, did you find it?"

"Behind my suitcase, on the top shelf in the bedroom closet. I'd left some things in the suitcase, and when I started to take it down I saw the gun."

"The lieutenant tells me you have a record, Miss Gardner."

"That's why I knew I had to get rid of the gun. I knew that if I turned it over to the police I'd only stir up trouble for myself."

"Are you on parole now?"

"No. I got a suspended sentence. I'm on probation."

"What was the conviction for?"

"Shoplifting."

"You have any idea who might have planted the gun there?"

"No. I've been trying to . . . Oh, what's the use? Now I'll go to prison, just for having that gun in my purse long enough to take it to the corner and throw it away. It's so unfair."

I studied her for a moment. "Were you home this morning, Miss Gardner, say from eight-thirty till nine-thirty?"

"I was there till about nine. That's when I leave for work."

I got out my notebook and pencil. "Where do you work?"

"I'm a beauty operator at the Shellvan Salon."

"Do you know a girl named Frances Cole?"

"Frances Cole . . . ? No."

"Was there anyone with you at your apartment this morning?"

"No."

"Did you see anyone, or receive any telephone calls?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"I wondered if you could establish your presence there."

"Oh. Is — is it important?"

"It might be. Now tell me this. Has anyone visited you at your apartment who might have left the gun there? Maybe not someone you would suspect, but someone who *could* have left it?"

"No. I don't have any men friends, and what few girl friends I had threw me over when I was arrested."

I leaned close, watching for reaction. "Do you know a man named Robert Dykeman?"

She thought for a moment. "No," she said, "I never heard of him." She showed none of the reactions I was watching for, none of the physiological changes that lying invariably produces and which, sometimes, a detective can perceive without the use of a polygraph.

I slipped the notebook and pencil back in my pocket and got to my feet.

"Are you going to put me in jail?"

"Not just yet. At least not in a cell. Let's put it this way. I'm going to ask you to stick around here a while of your own free will. You can stay in here, or you can go outside and talk to the lieutenant. Meanwhile I'll be checking out a few things. If I can verify your story, fine. If I can't, I'll have to charge you."

"I think I'll wait in here," she said.

"Good. If you need anything, ask the lieutenant for it."

"You'll find out I'm telling the truth."

"Let's hope so. Do you have your apartment key with you?"

She reached into her purse and handed me a key folder. "It's the large one," she said.

I dropped the folder in my pocket and left the room. As I passed the lieutenant's desk I paused long enough to tell him the arrangement I'd made with Lucille Gardner.

"Where are you off to now?" he asked.

"I've got a strong hunch the Gardner girl is telling the truth."

"You know how far hunches will get you in this racket. Especially when it comes to women."

"Maybe so. But she and Frances Cole both live in the same apartment building."

"Isn't that the girl who found the body — Frances Cole?"

"Yes."

"I see what you mean," he said.

"Maybe we're going to have a red-faced cop around here, Steve. Meaning you. If that gal sneaked a gun out of there right under your eyes, you're never going to live it down. Hell, I'll never *let* you live it down."

"She didn't take it out of there, Lieutenant. Not in that second skin she was using for a dress."

12.

The apartment house at 1018 West 50th was one of the newer buildings on the block. It wasn't at all pretentious, but it looked clean and well-tended. The lobby was very small and there was no switchboard. I walked back to the elevator, showed the elderly operator my shield, and said, "Which floor would apartment thirty-four be on?"

"The fifth," he said. "They don't number here like they do most places. There's eight apartments on each floor."

"Are all of them pretty much alike?"

"All furnished. And all just alike."

"Are you the man who talked to the police a while ago?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know a Miss Frances Cole?"

"No, sir — not by name. I haven't been here long enough to know all the tenants' names."

"Is there a back entrance?"

"No, sir. There's just the door for the fire stairs. You couldn't hardly call it a back entrance. Not

like these fancy buildings have, anyhow."

I stepped into the elevator. "Mind taking me up to five?"

"Right away, sir."

He closed the doors, and I got out the key folder Lucille Gardner had given me and walked along the corridor to her apartment.

I opened the door and stepped into a living room that couldn't have been more than nine by nine. There was very little furniture, but what there was of it was fairly new and of good quality. The room was immaculate. Even the bottoms of the ash trays gleamed. I crossed to a door and went into the bedroom. Here again there was little furniture. I went to the closet and looked inside. There were far too many dresses and shoes for so small a space, but they were arranged so neatly that there was no effect of overcrowding.

On the top shelf there was a small leather suitcase. I took it down and removed the strip of heavy wrapping paper with which the shelf had been lined. There were two tiny brown stains with the characteristic dull sheen that dried oil leaves. I sniffed at them. They smelled like oil, all right, though not necessarily gun oil.

Twenty minutes after I'd got out of the elevator I stepped into it again and asked the operator which floor apartment twelve was on.

It was on the first, at the back of the building, behind the elevator.

I rang Frances Cole's bell off and

on for almost two full minutes before she answered. When she opened the door she was dressed in a housecoat and high-heeled mules. She wore no makeup, and somehow its absence made her seem even prettier, as well as much younger.

"You again," she said. "The gentleman detective."

"May I come in, Miss Cole?"

"How could I stop you?" She stepped back and closed the door quickly behind me, as if she would have been ashamed to have anyone see me enter her apartment.

I glanced around the room. Except for a few books strewn about and a slightly different arrangement of the furniture, it might have been the same living room I'd left just a few moments ago.

Things were beginning to come into focus now. Not sharply. Not completely. But the pattern was beginning to shape up.

I sat down on the arm of a chair and studied the girl.

"We found the gun," I said.

"Good. You're more efficient than I thought."

I made it casual. "A neighbor of yours had it. A girl right here in this building."

"Oh, God!" she breathed.

"It's about time you told me the truth," I said. "You were lying when you told me there was nothing between you and Mr. Dykeman, weren't you?"

"We were going to get married," she said. Her eyes came up slowly,

searching my face. "Do you — do you think that I killed him?"

"It'll be a lot better if you let me ask the questions, miss."

"But . . ."

"Just relax a little, and give me some straight answers."

She sank down on the studio couch, fumbling nervously with the neck of her housecoat. "What do you want to know?"

"Were you in love with Mr. Dykeman?"

"I said we were going to get married. Just as soon as he could get a divorce."

"The main point was to get a well-to-do husband, wasn't it?"

She nodded again, almost imperceptibly.

"And in that case, there were probably other men besides Mr. Dykeman," I said. "Is that right?"

"I'd stopped seeing anyone else."

"How long ago?"

"Two — no, three weeks ago."

"And before that?"

She hesitated for a moment. "I went out with Mr. Noland a few times."

"Just a few?"

"Well . . . All right, I saw him frequently. . . . But I don't understand what that's got to do with it."

"I'm trying to fill in the picture," I said. "What happened between you and Noland?"

She looked away from me. "Well, Jerry was a nice boy, and all, but after I got to know Mr. Dykeman . . ." She paused for a mo-

ment. "There's no use being evasive, I guess. I thought Mr. Dykeman would be a much better husband."

"Because he made more money, and because his future was brighter?"

"Yes."

"Did Mrs. Dykeman know about you and her husband? I mean, that you planned to get married?"

"No."

"I understand Mr. Dykeman and Mr. Noland were very good friends."

"They were."

"How'd your switch from Noland to Dykeman affect that friendship?"

"It didn't affect it at all. Oh, I suppose Jerry was hurt, but he didn't hold it against Bob. And Bob felt very guilty about it. He knew Jerry understood that I had a right to decide for myself, but he still felt bad about it. He was always trying to make it up to Jerry in little ways."

"Forgetting Mr. Noland for a moment — are there any other ex-boy friends of yours who might still be jealous enough to have wanted to kill Mr. Dykeman?"

She shook her head. "I'm sure there aren't."

"But there *were* boy friends?"

"Well, of course. But none who would do a thing like that."

"We can't take anything for granted, Miss Cole. Nothing at all. Can you give me a list of them?"

She walked to the telephone table and came back with a small address book.

She read off half a dozen names and phone numbers and then dropped

the address book down beside her.

"Any of these men have keys to your apartment?"

She said it almost defiantly. "All of them did."

"Including Mr. Noland?"

"Yes."

"How long have you lived here, Miss Cole?"

"Two years. Ever since I moved to New York. I mean that's how long I've lived here in the building. I've been in this apartment only since last week. Since last Friday."

"What apartment did you have before?"

"Thirty-four. Up on the fifth floor."

"Would you mind getting dressed? Nothing complicated. Just a dress will do."

"But why?"

"I want you to do me a favor. First, though, I want you to answer a question for me. You told me you'd stopped seeing anyone but Mr. Dykeman, about three weeks ago."

"That's right."

"And that would include men visiting you at your apartment. Still, one or more of them might have just dropped in for a few minutes. Unexpectedly, perhaps."

"There's been no one to see me, either here or in the old apartment upstairs."

"Have you told anyone about changing your apartment?"

"I told Mr. Dykeman, of course."

"Anyone else?"

"No."

"Good. Would you mind getting into that dress now?"

She shrugged and moved toward the bedroom. "Whatever you say."

13.

When we were in Lucille Gardner's apartment I nodded toward the phone on the table at one end of the studio couch. "I'd like for you to call Mr. Noland," I said.

"Jerry? What for?"

"Call it a favor."

"What do you want me to say to him?"

"Just ask him to come over. That's all. Not another thing."

"What if he asks why?"

"Let him ask. Tell him you can't talk about it over the phone, but that you've got to see him right away. Immediately."

She had her courage back now. God only knew what she was thinking as she dialed and talked to Jerry Noland, but none of it showed on her face or in her voice.

She put the phone down.

And from that moment on, neither of us said another word until the door bell sounded, fifteen minutes later. I put my finger to my lips and shook my head at her.

Then there was the scrape of a key in the lock and the door swung inward.

"I thought you'd like to know we found the murder gun, Mr. Noland," I said.

He jerked around toward me, his face lighting up expectantly. "That right? Did you find the guy that goes with it?"

"Maybe," I said.

"Where'd you find it?"

"Here in this apartment."

"Here?" He swung back toward Frances Cole again, his face slack with shock. "Frances!" he said incredulously. "You? . . . did it?"

She shook her head slowly, and there was something very close to a smile on her lips. "No, Jerry."

"Someone planted the gun in a closet back there," I said. "I'm surprised we didn't get an anonymous phone call, telling us just where to find it. We didn't though, and that means we'll get a letter tomorrow, giving us the same information. The point is, the job was bungled."

Noland stared at me for a long moment. "Just what the hell are you driving at, Manning?"

"Well, I'll say this much, Mr. Noland. It would have been pretty hard to put that gun in the closet if a man didn't have a key to the front door. That's no cheap spring lock on there. It would give even an expert locksmith a hard time."

"My having a key doesn't prove a thing, and you know it."

"That's true — but it does tell us that you had the means."

"So?"

"And you had the opportunity. You could have overheard Miss Cole talking to Dykeman this morning when he asked her to go out to his

house. You told me yourself you were in and out of the office a lot of the time. You could have taken a cab and been up there in less than five minutes. You could have knocked off Dykeman, come over here and climbed the fire stairs to plant the gun in the closet, and been back at your desk — all within half an hour."

He leaned back and crossed his legs, smiling at me. "I *could* have. Of course. A lot of things *could* have happened. But you'd look a little silly trying to *prove* one damn thing."

"I've been meaning to ask you something," I said. "When Miss Cole told you she wanted to see you right away, why didn't you go to her apartment?"

Noland frowned. "You nuts? Where do you think I am right now, for God's sake?"

"It happens I know for sure, Noland. This apartment belongs to a young lady named Lucille Gardner. You probably never even heard of her."

14.

I'd made myself ready for what happened, of course, but even so I was almost too slow. Or maybe it was that Noland was too fast. He was off that couch and within a foot of the girl before I smashed my shoulder into his back and knocked him sprawling to the floor.

I reached down and picked up his

gun and tucked it in my belt. Then I looked at Frances Cole.

"Thank you, Miss Cole," I said.

She opened the door and closed it behind her without saying a word.

I lit a cigarette and sat down on the studio couch and looked at Jerry Noland. "What'd you do with the shell?" I asked. "The one that shucked out of your automatic when you shot Dykeman."

He stared at me, his face slack. "In the grating just across the street from the Tyler Building." Suddenly his voice grew shrill. "He always won! He took Betty away from me and married her and didn't give a damn about her and then he got the promotion I was supposed to have and then he took Frances away from me just the same way he did Betty and then he Dyke, goddamn you! *Goddamn* you!"

"Take it easy, Noland," I said.

He shook his head slowly. "I was going to get Betty back for myself. I was going to kill him and have his wife and the job I should have had and I was even going to get part of the insurance money."

I looked away. It isn't pleasant to look at a madman, especially one you've seen go mad before your eyes. I picked up the phone.

"I was finally going to win," Noland said. "I was going to win everything." He began to whimper softly. "But it was Dyke that won."

I walked to the window and stood looking down into the street, waiting for the squad car.

The Alligator Man



Joe Ball was the biggest man in Texas—even his murders were something special.

BY TOM BEACH

ABOUT twenty miles from San Antonio, in the heart of Texas, is a small town called Elmendorf. In this little Texan place lived, and died, one of the biggest, most star-

ting, most original and handsomest killers who ever walked the face of the earth. And if that sounds like a lot of praise, just remember: he was born and bred in Texas, where everything, according to the natives, is bigger and better than elsewhere.

His name was Joe Ball. He was over six feet tall, muscular and good-looking. He was a crack shot and a feared boxer. He was proud of his fantastic capacity for liquor, but he was prouder of the many beautiful girls who worked in his restaurant. He hand-picked them for his place, the *Sociable Inn*, and they became a main tourist attraction.

Customers of the *Sociable Inn* came from San Antonio and even further away.

They didn't all come to see the waitresses, though. Undoubtedly, some of them came to see Joe Ball's alligators.

Joe had a cement pool in back of his inn, and in the pool he kept several large and hungry alligators. He used to amuse guests of the inn by

taking them out to the pool to watch him throw raw meat — and an occasional live cat or dog — to the alligators. He kept the alligators hungry enough to provide a good show.

In 1937, a new waitress came to work for Joe Ball. Her name was Minnie Mae Gotthardt; she was twenty years old and she was, of course, beautiful. Joe Ball himself fell for her, and the young girl couldn't resist him. The resulting romance went on for several months.

Then Minnie Mae discovered that Joe was engaged to a girl known as Buddy. She staged a fight with Ball and left town. Her threats to break up the romance between Joe Ball and Buddy continued in occasional letters, and in May, 1937, she returned to the *Sociable Inn*.

Joe Ball threw a beach party for her. Joe, Minnie Mae, and Joe's handyman, Clifford Wheeler, drove off for the day. They didn't return until the next morning — and Minnie wasn't with them. Joe explained that Minnie had gotten a job somewhere else and had left without saying goodbye.

Later that year another waitress returned. This one's name was Julia, and her history was about the same as Minnie's had been. She'd left Ball after their romance had broken up, and gone to San Antonio. She returned to Elmendorf to have it out with Ball — and never was seen again. Ball explained glibly that Julia had found a job in California, and that he'd given her the bus fare.

Affairs progressed smoothly enough after that, until September, 1938. By that time Ball was romancing a waitress named Hazel Brown. Buddy was his wife by this time, but it didn't seem to matter to anyone concerned.

By September, 1938, the romance between Ball and Hazel Brown had gone on for several months. As usual, Ball grew tired of the girl, and she disappeared. He explained her sudden absence, of course, but now police began to get a little suspicious.

It seems that one of Ball's neighbors had been disturbed by a terrible smell coming from a rainbarrel near Ball's inn, and had come over to complain. In true Texas fashion, Ball drove him off the land with a gun. The neighbor complained to the local police, who inspected the barrel and found the bottom coated with drying blood. Ball explained that the barrel was used to store meat for the alligators. The police stayed suspicious, though, and became even more suspicious when they heard about Ball's having rolled a barrel off the tavern grounds the previous week. It seems Ball almost never did any of the actual work around his place. The police wondered why he was being so careful about barrels.

So a Texas ranger named Miller was consulted. He figured the direct approach was the best one, and in the true tradition of Texas Rangers he sauntered up to the *Sociable Inn* one night and called Joe Ball over for a talk.

"Want a drink?" Ball asked sociably.

"No," Miller said. "I want to talk to you."

"Then I'll draw a beer for myself," Ball said. He went behind the bar, punched open the cash register and drew a gun. Before anybody could stop him he'd fired a shot into his own head.

With Ball dead, the rest was easy. It was soon established that he'd

murdered the missing waitresses as he got tired of them, and that in at least one case (that of Minnie Mae Gotthardt) his handyman, Clifford Wheeler, was forced to help him. But Ball's record of multiple murder isn't what makes him such an original and startling killer. Rather, it's his invention of the ultimate in disposing of the corpse.

After all, the alligators were hungry . . .



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Here's your chance to be a detective! All the clues you need to follow Jim Rogers' reasoning and come up with the guilty man are in the story. Find the guilty man and the clues which point to him in the story. In 200 words or less, finish the story. The best ending to this story, in the opinion of the editors of Manhunt, which reaches us before December 1, 1955, will win for its author a \$50 prize. The name of the winner and his entry will be published in our May 1956 issue. Because of the number of entries, no correspondence can be entered into regarding any submission, nor can entries be acknowledged or returned. Duplicate awards will be made in case of ties. It is not necessary to purchase this magazine in order to enter the contest. All entries should be addressed to Contest Editor, Manhunt Magazine, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y.

YOU, detective

9. — The Obliging Fire

BY WILSON HARMAN

JIM ROGERS, claims adjustor for Regent Insurance Co., pointed to a blown-up picture of a fire-gutted room. "There's the reason we're refusing to honor your claim on the loss of your warehouse, Mr. Green." He pointed to two badly charred areas. "The intensity of the flame at these two spots — here at the filing cabinets and here at the old safe — have convinced our investigators that it was a case of arson."

Tom Green rubbed the back of his hand wearily across his eyes, shook his head. "I don't see what that's got to do with it."

"In an accidental fire, there's one starting place, then the flames spread. It's obvious this one started in two places simultaneously."

A little old man sitting on one of the chairs nodded, chuckled.

Green ignored the little man, addressed Rogers. "But why? The insurance doesn't cover my loss, my employees are out of a job, my customers are without their goods. Who would profit by it?"

The little man spoke up. "A crook. A crook like you. Business was bad, maybe? It wouldn't be the first time a crook —"

The man standing alongside Green swung on the little man. "You're a liar, Miller." He turned to Rogers. "I'm Craig, Mr. Green's general manager. There was nothing wrong with business. We're having our biggest year. Maybe the fire was set for spite. Ask Miller about that."

Miller leaned over, spat at him. "You're crooks. You steal from little men like me. For twenty-five years I do business with them, now I find they're crooks. You should rot in jail, both of you."

Rogers broke off the tirade with a gesture. "We heard of your quarrel with Mr. Green's manager, Mr. Craig here. That's why we asked you to come in, Mr. Miller. We checked on the Green Company. Everybody agrees that both the company and Mr. Green have an excellent reputation."

"You're in with them," Miller screamed. "A crook like them —"

"Don't pay any attention to him, Mr. Rogers. He's a crier," Craig broke in. "I checked the records. I couldn't find any of these errors he's complaining about."

Green nodded. "I knew nothing about it until Miller called me the other day. He was positively abusive over the phone. I asked Craig about

it and he assured me Miller was a crackpot. I thought he was harmless — but now —"

Miller pointed a gnarled finger at him. "Crook. That's what you are, a crook. How much did you figure to make from the fire? A fortune, huh?"

"Mr. Green was telling the truth when he says the insurance was painfully inadequate, Mr. Miller." The claims agent walked over, sat on the edge of his desk. "We're convinced that the fire was not set for gain, but for some other motive such as revenge."

"Prove it." The little man jumped to his feet, hopped around in rage. "That he'd like. First he steals from me, now he wants to put me in jail to shut me up. But first you got to prove it."

Rogers nodded. "We already can prove it was arson, Mr. Miller. I think we can also prove who did it — and why."



Low Tide

Harry knew just what to do with his wife and her lover. He took them out to a small, deserted island . . .

BY COLE PRICE

HE LIT a cigarette and flipped the match away in the wind. I was fitting a dutchman into the dingy hull and he was squatting on the dock a few feet away, watching as I caulked the seams with oakum. The wind picked up tiny particles of it and blew them against his chest to lodge in the diamond-shaped patch of blond hair. I looked up at his face and wondered just what it was that made him so attractive to women.

Then I thought: This is the same Chuck as before. The same guy you grew up with. The guy you played football with and graduated with and joined the Corps with. You fought with him and laughed with him and got drunk with him and cried with him when so many of the good ones got it on Iwo. This is the same old Chuck; he hasn't changed a



bit. It's just that he slept with your wife last night. And even now you can't hate him.

"Harry, you're a stupid son-of-a-gun," he was saying.

I swallowed the constriction in my throat. "What do you mean by that?" For a moment I had the strange feeling he was going to come right out and tell me about it.

"Going all the way up to Corpus to buy that engine and then staying there all night to install the damn thing by yourself."

Not *all* night, I thought bitterly. I was back in Port Isabel at two o'clock this morning. But I didn't go home. I started to, but I had seen Chuck's car parked there in the grove of palms behind the house and kept driving. "I saved a hundred and seventy bucks," I said. It was hard to keep the sick feeling I felt on the inside from coming out in my voice.

"What the hell, it's only money."

"Half of it's yours," I told him. We had come down together after the war and formed Fishing, Incorporated. It was strictly a small operation, but the money was good and it left us with a lot of free time. We owned a piece of a run-down dock, a thirty-eight foot job for the five bucks a day bait and tackle furnished trade, and a sleek little twenty footer for the private parties. The *Spray* was the little one I had taken up to Corpus for the new engine.

Chuck grinned and stood up, stretching. "Touché." He took a

last drag from the cigarette and pitched it over the edge of the dock. "God, this sun's hot. Let's close up for the rest of the day and go find a nice cool place to drink beer. No one is going to want to go out this late in the day anyway."

"No," I said, "I want to take the *Spray* out for a little while. On the way down this morning, I thought I felt some kind of screwy vibration pattern. I want to check it out."

He shrugged his shoulders. "You want me to come along?" I tried to make something out of it and couldn't. The question was a legitimate one. I was the one with the mechanical knack. Chuck confined his activities to the finer aspects of running a charter outfit.

"Yeah," I said, trying to make it sound casual, "I thought I'd call Carol and have her come down and we'd all go out for a run."

I watched his eyes for some sign of guilt and found none. Not the slightest flicker, but then he had no reason to suspect I knew about last night. "Oh, I get it," he grinned, "A sort of a picnic. Tell Carol to stir up a batch of her famous avocado salad to go with the sandwiches."

I started into the shack to telephone and he called after me. "And tell her to bring along some beer."

While I made the call, Chuck finished forcing compound around the dutchman and moved the dingy out of the way over to the edge of the dock. He loaded ice in the icebox while I checked the gas tanks and

topped them off. It would take Carol about forty minutes from the time I called her, so I killed the rest of the time going over the new engine. It wasn't new except to us, a second-hand Chrysler that had been rebuilt by a guy I knew who had a little shop up near Matagorda Bay. He had given me a good deal on it.

Chuck was out on the dock when Carol drove up and he helped her aboard, taking the basket of food and the two cartons of canned beer from her. He put the basket of food on one of the stern seats and started toward the icebox with the beer.

"I just took the beer out of the refrigerator at home," Carol called after him. "It should still be cold if you want one now." She leaned over and pecked me on the cheek. "Hi, Hon."

She looked especially good, just then, neat and trim in a light colored beach jacket she had thrown over a pair of very short, white shorts and a tiny halter that tied together in a flat knot at her back. She had pulled her hair up in back and had it pinned with a small silver clip I had given her, and the sun plunged into it and made it dance alive with highlights.

I suddenly felt very sorry that she was coming with us.

Chuck came back with three opened cans of beer. He passed one to Carol and put the other two on the rail while he tossed off the lines. I eased the *Spray* away from the dock and put her at quarter throttle to slide through the Brazos Santiago

Pass and out past the jetties and into the Gulf. The new engine purred softly, as smooth as a fine Swiss watch. The water was calm and clear as glass, with only a slight wind ripple on the surface.

"Harry's looking for some imaginary vibration period," Chuck was telling Carol. They were sitting in the two swivel chairs we'd put in the stern, looking out over our wake. They were sitting close, with their shoulders touching, and I wondered if Chuck would have nerve to try anything with me so close by. I didn't think he would. He was playing it very carefully. A shiny black porpoise rose at the edge of our wake and Chuck heaved his empty beer can at it. They both laughed when he missed it by thirty feet.

We cleared the last rocks of the jetty and I eased the throttle slightly forward as we started the run down the beach. The mouth of the river was about seven miles from the channel and I stayed well out past the fourth bar. The tide was dead low, and I could see the sand roiling as the beach swells broke over the barely submerged bars. Except for the dead ache in the pit of my stomach it was like any one of a hundred other days with Carol and Chuck and me fooling around out in the Gulf.

"Find anything yet?" Chuck asked at my shoulder. I looked around and saw Carol was still in the stern chair. She had swung around in it to face us and was watching me with faintly curious amusement. She had taken

off the beach jacket to catch the sun on her shoulders and the wind tugged softly at her hair.

"No, not yet." I eased the throttle over to full speed. "You feel anything?"

He cocked his head over to the side for a moment, listening. "Nope. She sounds steady to me."

I let the engine race for a moment longer, then let it idle down. "Must have been my imagination, like you said."

He slapped me playfully on the shoulder. "You're always looking for something to go wrong with this tub just to give you a good excuse to tear her down and put her back together again." He turned to Carol. "How does it feel to play first alternate to a hunk of boat?"

For just a moment, something intimate passed between them, warming the air, then Carol looked at me and grinned. "I'm used to it, I guess. I never seem to notice it."

I edged the *Spray* away from the beach as we approached the mouth of the river and started a long, sweeping curve to skirt the fan shaped edge of silt-laden water and the thousands of tiny bars that dotted it just below the surface. We crossed into Mexican waters and I let her have her head for about twenty minutes, then began to angle her back toward the Mexican shore.

The Mexican shoreline was still a hazy, sawtoothed line in the distance when I found the spot I was looking for, a tiny, almond shaped

bar that barely stuck above the water when the tide was very low. I cut the engine and let the *Spray* drift up along side it. We waded out onto the bar, carrying the basket of food, and Carol spread a tarp out on the sand.

The picnic wasn't much fun, and the sun was still a narrow rim behind us when we finished the sandwiches and started on the last three cans of beer. I waited until we finished, then stood up. "Carol, I want you to take the *Spray* and go for a ride."

A worried look came into her eyes. "Why? Isn't it about time to go in? The tide will be starting back in pretty soon."

"Please, Honey, just go ahead and do what I say. Come back in about thirty minutes or so."

She looked at Chuck, and when he didn't say anything, she turned and waded out to the boat. The engine coughed once, then caught and roared into life. She waved, then turned the *Spray* and pointed her back toward the river.

We sat there until she was out of sight, neither of us speaking. Chuck finally broke the silence. "You want to get it off your chest?" he asked.

I spoke very carefully, trying to keep my voice level. "I know about last night. I saw your car."

He didn't answer for a while, then said quietly, "I thought that was it. What are you going to do about it?" The way he said it, it didn't sound sarcastic, only sad.

"I'm going to beat the hell out of

you." Somehow, it didn't sound the way I wanted it to.

"Why come all the way down here to do it? You could have done that back at the docks."

"Someone might have seen us and stopped it. This is a private thing between us, and I want to keep it that way."

"Why did you bring Carol along?"

"I thought I wanted her to watch it. I changed my mind. She's not to blame for anything. You're a good looking guy, Chuck, and I know the way you operate. She just couldn't help herself. I can see that, now."

"And it's all my fault?"

"Yes," I said, "All your fault. You'd better keep your mouth closed. I don't want to break your teeth." Then I hit him.

It didn't last very long. We would have been pretty evenly matched, but he refused to do anything more than make a half-hearted attempt to protect his face. I just didn't feel like hitting him when he wouldn't fight back.

I walked over and sat down on the canvas, feeling ashamed of myself without understanding exactly why. Chuck soaked a rag in salt water and stopped his nose from bleeding, then came over and sat down beside me. His tongue had been cut somehow, and a trace of blood stained his lips.

"Look, Harry," he said after a while, "There's something I have to say. You were right about last night,

I won't try to deny that, and I guess you were right in beating me up, but you're wrong in thinking it was all my fault. You think Carol's a nice, sweet kid, but she's not. She's nothing but a tramp."

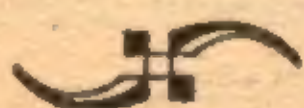
"Don't say anything else," I warned him.

"You've got to hear this. She asked me over there last night. It wasn't the first time. I didn't want to go, but she insisted." He stopped and rubbed his palms across his eyes. "I'm telling you for your own good, Harry. She wanted me to help her arrange an accident — wanted me to help her —"

I couldn't have helped myself if I'd wanted to. I hit him as hard as I could, throwing myself forward into the punch. He wasn't expecting it and it landed solidly on the point of his chin with all my weight.

Chuck still hadn't moved when darkness finally came, but the water that was creeping up around him would soon revive him. In a little while the water would cover the bar completely; later the water would be five or six foot deep and the undertow that could sweep a man off his feet would pass across the bar.

Carol had been gone for over an hour when Chuck began to struggle awake and, looking down at him in the ankle-deep water, I knew somehow that she wasn't coming back.



MUGGED AND PRINTED

W. R. BURNETT, famous author of *Little Caesar*, *Nobody Lives Forever* and many other world-renowned books and motion pictures,



makes his *Manhunt* debut this month with a realistic, tough and surprising novelette, *Vanishing Act*. Burnett's fame as a reporter of gang life continues to grow with each new book — ever since *Little Caesar* started him on the ladder of fame. His latest book, a

bit off the beaten track, is the historical novel *Captain Lightfoot*, for which he's also done the movie screenplay. Burnett lives in California, where he's now at work on more movie scripts and on another book.

JONATHAN CRAIG, whose newest Police Files novel, *The Man Between*, appears in this issue, is the author of the Gold Medal novel



The Dead Darling (an expanded and changed version of the novelette which appeared, under the same title, in our October 1954 issue) and of other best-selling books. Craig's Police Files series, according to one enthusiastic fan, have "opened up a whole

new area of realistic mystery fiction." We agree enthusiastically — and we're sure that, after reading *The Man Between*, you'll agree too.

BRYCE WALTON's latest *Manhunt* story, *Big Frank*, is the most shocking he's done to date. Walton's previous work in *Manhunt* includes the popular *I'll Never Tell*, *The Movers* and many other top-grade stories. ♦ SAM MERWIN, JR., popular editor-turned-author, presents a surprising story with a novel background in *Woman Hater*, his latest for *Manhunt*. We'll be bringing you more of Merwin's solid and unique stories soon. ♦ CHARLES BEAUMONT, a young writer whose recent appearances in *Esquire* and other magazines have started him on his way to the top, makes his *Manhunt* debut this month with *I'll Do Anything*, an unusual story of teenagers on their own. ♦ COLE PRICE's *Manhunt* debut, the startling *Low Tide*, marks the first sale for Mr. Price, a young author from Arkansas.

HAL ELLSON'S *Fat Boy* is another entirely different story from the author of *Duke*, *Summer Street* and other best-selling novels. Ellson's work with juvenile delinquents helps to make his stories and novels realistic and believable, and his books are used in several college sociology courses as textbooks on delinquency. Ellson's latest book, *Rock*, is now on the stands — but, according to advance reports, you'd better hurry if you want to pick up a copy of this fast-selling novel. Ellson, now at work on more stories for *Manhunt*, lives in Brooklyn with his wife and two children.



RICHARD MARSTEN, author of *Runaway Black*, *The Dead Nurse* and other popular novels, returns to *Manhunt* this month with the startling and sensitive

Time To Kill. Marsten likes to travel, and plans one day to take a comprehensive tour of the United States; he's toured the country twice but still feels that there are a lot of important things he hasn't had time to see.

During this third trip he'll be turning out more fine stories for *Manhunt* readers about such new locales as the Japan of *Time to Kill*.



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**2 THE CASE OF THE
RUNAWAY CORPSE**

Myrna Davenport hires Mason to get a letter accusing her of planning to poison her husband Ed. (He has just died of poisoning!) All Perry finds is —blank paper! The police say Perry hid the **REAL** letter!

**3 THE CASE OF THE
FUGITIVE NURSE**

Perry sneaks into an apartment; finds an **empty safe**. Then a blonde **slams the safe shut**. Not sinister... except that the **tenant** had been **MURDERED!**

4 MAN MISSING
By Mignon G. Eberhart

Sarah Kent noticed odd things at the hospital: A smell of ether in the **wrong place**. A door closing by itself. And then the still figure on the bed. The chief suspect, **A MAN DEAD FOR 3 YEARS!**

**5 THE THIRD
BULLET**

By John Dickson Carr
Vicky Adams disappeared from a cottage even though **all the doors and windows were still locked from the inside!** She isn't found—**ALIVE!**

**6 TELL HER
IT'S MURDER**

By Helen Reilly
Your name is Jim Andrus. You attend a party, have too much to drink. You "black out." Next morning you're accused of **MURDER!**

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